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THE FAIREST FLOWER OF PARADISE

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE LITANY
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, EN-
RICHED WITH EXAMPLES DRAWN
FROM THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

BY

VERY REV. ALEXIS M. LEPICIER, O.S.M.
Consultor of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, etc.



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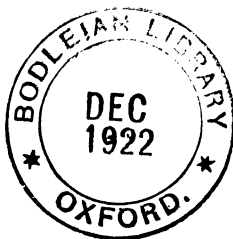
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✠PATRICK J. HAYES, D.D.

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PREFACE



IT WAS on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception that the idea first occurred to me of writing a popular work on the Litany of Loreto.

This Litany has been held in honor throughout the Church for many centuries: it is daily recited by millions of the faithful, and has even become an integral part in some of our public acts of worship. We have therefore thought that it would not be out of place to inquire into its doctrinal meaning, and to give to light the fruits of our studies for the edification of the Christian people.

For it seemed to us that while others on this great occasion were offering to Mary profound and erudite treatises, this tender Mother would none the less deign to accept a work, unworthy indeed of her, but yet a pledge of boundless love and gratitude.

Encouraged by this hope, we set ourself to the task, and were presently surprised to see how easy it is, by the application of simple principles, to trace in these invocations all the mysteries of the life of the Blessed Virgin: her

excellences, her privileges, and her sorrows. In reciting the Litany, the faithful, mayhap unconsciously, go over the whole field of Marian theology.

As every one knows, Mary occupies a unique position in the economy of the universe. Her divine Maternity has raised her high above all creatures, even the very angels: she is the epitome of God's works and through the Incarnation of the Word, she is in some sort bound to the Most Holy Trinity by the ties of parentage. Now, the full tale of all these privileges and splendors is, in our opinion, summed up in the Litany of Loreto, that Litany which is, as it were, the Christian people's hymn in honor of Mary, their daily tribute of praise and love to this divine Mother.

Moreover, a pious custom has been universally introduced, of honoring Mary in a special manner during the month of May. In many places the praiseworthy custom obtains of a course of sermons about the Blessed Virgin, in which the prerogatives and the mysteries of her mortal life are dwelt upon. But although it is easy to speak about Mary, it is not equally easy to do so in a fitting manner. For this there is required a profound knowledge of Catholic doctrine, since in Mary are to be found the perfections of the entire universe: rather we should say that in Marian theology the whole deposit of Christian

faith and morality in some way or another lies hid.

It behoves us, therefore, to give the most faithful and exact utterance, to all that concerns the Mother of God. If indeed the Church cares, as with a holy jealousy, about Mary's honor, if the name of this holy Virgin is in the mouth of all the faithful, if her sanctuaries are spread over all the earth, in a word, if Mary is that Woman seen in the Apocalyptic vision, "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars," ¹—is it not fitting that we should strive our utmost to study and know her as she is? In studying Mary we study Jesus, we contemplate the Holy Trinity, we meditate on grace, the sacraments and our last end, because in all the works of God, Mary holds her assigned place: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning." ²

Considering, therefore, that every point of Christian doctrine is after some fashion comprised in Mary, and that one of the most efficacious means to promote the Christian life, is to propose to the faithful the example of the divine Mother, we have thought it profitable to write a popular work, having for its foundation the series of invocations contained in the Litany

¹ APOC. XII, 1.

² PROV. VIII, 22.

of Loreto. In this work the whole Marian theology is briefly set forth, while at the same time the principal dogmas of our Faith and the moral duties of the Christian are brought to mind.

With this in view, we have deemed it advisable to follow the logical sequence in our treatment of what belongs to the Blessed Virgin, applying to each subject that invocation which appears most fitting. Since, however, several of these invocations are in fact but different expressions of one idea,¹ we have been obliged, in order to avoid treating the same subject twice, to adapt to some of them, themes which at first sight may not appear to correspond with them very exactly, though in reality there is no notable discrepancy.

To the usual invocations we have added that which is proper to the Order of Servants of Mary, *Regina Servorum tuorum*—"Queen of Thy Servants," an invocation which has afforded us the opportunity of speaking about the royal dignity which here below invests every Christian who devoutly serves the glorious Mother of God.

And now, as to our design in writing this little book, we may say that it has been to collect in one, under the heading of the invocations of the Litany of Loreto, whatsoever belongs to the Most Holy Virgin, in its relation to the dogmas of faith and the precepts of Christian morality.

¹ For example "Holy Virgin of Virgins" and "Queen of Virgins."

Without entering into subtle points of theology which, useful enough in their own proper time and place, would be little appreciated by ordinary Christians, we have endeavored to weave a garland of all that is most beautiful and at the same time of the greatest practical utility in Mary's life. This Woman without peer is by far the fairest flower of heaven, a flower of so sweet perfume, that only to breathe its fragrance suffices to fill the soul with purest delight. The spiritual enjoyment derived from a more intimate knowledge of Mary, is ample recompense for the labor of study.

With a view to making the present little work serviceable to many, we have appended two tables: the first containing the traditional order of the invocations of the Litany of Loreto with the titles of the different subjects we have allotted to each: the second presenting the same subjects arranged in logical sequence. This latter table may be used by those who, whether for their own private study, or with a view to giving public instructions, prefer to have a complete and well-ordered course on all those matters which regard the Most Holy Virgin.

Those who wish to make use of this book for the purpose of finding therein subjects for conferences or sermons during the month of May, can make choice of those invocations which seem best calculated to meet the needs of their audi-

ence. For the rest, the subjects are independent one of the other, and taken separately will perhaps be found of value for occasional sermons.

We lay down this little book at the feet of the Immaculate Virgin, with the ardent longing that she may become more and more known and loved. There is no surer or shorter way to Jesus than the knowledge and love of Mary. Who-soever would find Jesus must seek Him at Mary's hands, for it is written of the Magi that they found Him nowhere else except in His Mother's arms. *Invenerunt puerum cum Maria Matre ejus.*¹

¹ MATT. II, 11.

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“At the name
Of that fair flower, whom duly I invoke
Both morn and eve, my soul with all her might
Collected, on the goodliest ardour fix’d.”

Dante, *Parad.*, Canto xxiii
(Cary's Translation)

Holy Mary

PREDESTINATION AND NAME OF MARY

"Thy name and thy remembrance are the desire of my soul: my soul hath desired thee in the night."

(Is. XXVI, 8-9.)

GOD, having decreed that He would become Man for the salvation of the human race, at the same time decided that He would be born of a woman, so that He might not only be like unto us by nature, but, furthermore, be one of our race.

For the fulfillment of his designs, the Most High had chosen from all eternity a creature whom He freely predestinated to the sublime dignity of Mother of the Word, and likewise to be the recipient of all those prerogatives of nature and grace which so high an office requires. For this cause God willed to raise this privileged creature, not only above all men, but also above all the choirs of angels. We need not wonder, then, if so noble a woman was, from the very beginning, by reason of the great mystery to be accomplished in her, the object of the divine complacency: "The Lord possessed me in the begin-

ning of His ways, before He made anything from the beginning.”¹

Admire and adore, O my soul, with all possible humility, the justice and mercy of God's ways. Render thanks to this great Lord, for having deigned to predestine a simple creature, of like nature with thyself, to so high a dignity. At the same time ask of Him grace to be contented and quiet in the place He has assigned thee upon this earth, and remember that the conditions of human life are all by His disposal: so that to wish to alter them is to desire the overthrow of the social order, which after all is God's own work.

* * *

It was reasonable to expect that the name of a woman privileged as Mary was, should comprehend in its meaning the office to which she was called, and the lofty privileges resulting from this office.

This blessed Name had been pronounced by God in the very act of predestining this wonderful creature. Further, we may believe that He Himself suggested it, by an interior inspiration, to the parents of this favored Child, when the time of her birth had come. This name is the Name of Mary. It may mean three things: sovereignty, bitterness, and resistance; three

¹ PROV. VIII, 22.

ideas which represent the principal prerogatives of our glorious Queen.

In the first place, Mary, by becoming Mother of the Incarnate Word, became also sovereign and mistress of the universe. Furthermore, since she was destined by God to coöperate with Jesus Christ in the ransom of the human race, she had to suffer the greatest torments which a pure creature ever endured. Lastly, by virtue of her Immaculate Conception, she was the first person to shake off the unhallowed yoke of the evil one, and thus in her own person to offer to God the first fruits of the Redemption. The Name of Mary, therefore, is at one time synonymous with her unrivaled greatness, her fathomless sorrows, and her splendid victories.

Blessed and holy Name! Thou art to my soul a source of boundless joy: sweeter than honey to the taste: more pleasing to the ear than the most exquisite melody.

* * *

The most holy Name of Mary, joined to that of Jesus, possesses a hidden power which puts to flight the demon, and fills the soul of him who utters it in loving faith, with consolation and hope. It is a certain fact that God has attached a beneficent power of sanctification and life to the devout uttering of these two Names by the faithful, and this precisely because Jesus

z

and Mary are the dearest objects of His love.

It is, then, the duty of every good Christian frequently to pronounce these two holy Names with faith, hope and reverence. We should call upon them in our needs, and do all in our power to prevent their unworthy usage by the lips of the profane. Alas! why is it that Names so great, so holy and at the same time so dear to our hearts, are oftentimes made the butt of scorn and raillery!

O my God, may thy great and awful Name be ever hallowed in those of Jesus, my Saviour, and Mary, His Blessed Mother! In them, we find our life and our salvation!

EXAMPLE

THE SEVEN HOLY FOUNDERS

In the thirteenth century, when the persecution carried on by Frederick II was raging against the Church, there lived in Florence seven illustrious men who, united by the bonds of Christian charity, strove to make their lives conform as far as possible to the dictates of evangelical perfection. On the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, 1233, when they were absorbed in prayer in the Laudesi chapel, Mary herself deigned to appear among them, inviting them to abandon all things and dedicate them-

selves to the service of her Son and herself. Promptly and joyfully they followed the summons of the Queen of Heaven and, abandoning wealth and relatives, withdrew to a solitary place to lead a life of austerity and union with God.

In order the better to flee the tumult of the world, after a short time they left Florence and betook themselves to Monte Senario, about nine miles northward of this city. There, for some years they continued their hidden life of penance, enjoying the ineffable sweetness promised to those who faithfully serve our divine Lord and His Holy Mother. On the evening of Good Friday, 1240, while meditating on the sorrowful mysteries which the Church commemorates on that day, the Queen of Heaven appeared to them again, bidding them found a Religious Order, the Order of her Servants, whose aim should be to spread devotion to her sorrows throughout the world. The object of this devotion was to recall the part which Mary had as the associate of Jesus in His work of redeeming mankind from the bondage of sin.

When the foundation of the Order had thus been laid by Mary herself, the Seven Holy Founders abandoned their beloved solitude of Monte Senario and undertook long journeys throughout Italy, France, Germany and Poland, everywhere preaching the sorrows and glories of

Mary, converting sinners and pacifying cities. Heavenly signs accompanied the death of each of these Saints. And as one love united them while they lived, so after their death one tomb received them all. In the course of centuries they were invoked together by the people, under the title of the Seven Holy Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, called also the Order of Servites. These holy men were all raised together to the honors of the altar by Pope Leo XIII, of holy memory, in the year 1888.

PRAYER

O Mary, my tender Mother, imprint thy Name, with that of Jesus, upon the inmost recesses of my heart. Obtain for me of God, in my last hour, to utter thy blessed Name and that of thy Son, with lively faith and ardent love, in order that by the virtue of these holy Names, the enemies of my salvation may be put to flight, and I may resign my soul into the hands of my Heavenly Father. Amen.

Holy Mother of God

INCOMPARABLE DIGNITY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

"She adored Him whom she brought forth,"
(Office of the Purification.)

THE human mind can never fully comprehend all that is contained in the title "Mother of God." It is the title by which the faithful love to address Mary, and the Church has sanctioned it by her infallible authority. All the beauties of nature, all the riches of grace, all the splendors of glory pale before the majestic grandeur of such a title as this. For, by the very fact of having conceived the Word Made Flesh, Mary has been united to God by the same ties which unite a mother to her true son.

Just as, therefore, the dignity of the human nature in Jesus Christ is immeasurably raised above all things created, by reason of the hypostatic union with the Divine Word, so also the dignity of Mary belongs to a superior order, on account of her position as Mother of God. This title is precisely the source and the measure of all those gifts of nature, grace and glory, wherewith the Lord was pleased to en-

rich her. "The Holy Mother of God has been elevated above the choirs of angels in the heavenly kingdom." ¹

Admire, O my soul, so great a miracle of the power of the Most High; and since He has deigned to call thee to the service of so great a Queen, render Him thanks and promise to thy Sovereign an eternal fidelity.

* * *

The title of Mother of God, with which the Catholic Church honors Mary, is not only the source of incomparable greatness in her, it is also a potent means to ground us firmly in the possession of true faith, and to bring us to a more perfect knowledge of the divine attributes.

In fact, the first step toward a recognition of Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world, is belief in the Divine Maternity: on the other hand, whosoever refuses to acknowledge Mary as true Mother of God, has by the very fact made shipwreck of the faith.

Further, Divine Wisdom shines forth the more clearly by the fact that God deigned to choose Mary for Mother of His Son. Of all God's works, the Incarnation is worthiest of the right hand of the Most High; but how can I sufficiently admire the counsels of Thy wisdom, O

¹ Versicle of the Magnificat on the Feast of the Assumption.

my God, since Thou hast willed to oppose to the work of destruction and death, begun in the sin of Eve and completed in that of Adam, a work of reparation, begun in the obedience of Mary, and consummated in the sacrifice of Jesus?

What glory accrues to the goodness of God from the Divine Maternity! For, in predestinating Mary to be the Mother of the Word, God also decreed to give her to us as our Mother also. He willed that she should accomplish in union with her Son the work of our redemption, and that by regenerating us to the life of grace, she should become our Mother in the spiritual order.

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!"¹

* * *

The Divine Maternity is indeed the starting-point of the work of our salvation. It is therefore the duty of every Christian fearlessly to proclaim this truth. In believing Mary to be the Mother of God, we believe also that the Word was made Flesh. But in order that this faith be not barren, it must be accompanied by a sincere worship both internal and external; a worship consisting in acts of homage, of veneration.

¹ ROM. XI, 33.

tion and of love for this peerless creature bound to us by so many titles.

The faithful soul cannot, then, do better than follow the example given us by the Church, which never tires of proclaiming this truth to the universe at large, whether by the erection of temples in Mary's honor, by the establishment of sodalities consecrated to her, by the approval of religious Orders devoted to her service, or by the institution of practices of piety in her honor.

Yes, Mary is indeed worthy to be saluted with the words addressed of old by Ozias, the Jewish leader, to Judith: "Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the Most High God, above all women upon the earth."¹

EXAMPLE

ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

The devotion to our blessed Lady is so intimately bound up with the whole deposit of Divine Revelation, that it is not possible to deny the prerogatives of this glorious Virgin, without offending against some truth of the Catholic Faith.

St. Cyril the great Bishop of Alexandria was the glorious champion of the Divine Mater-

¹ JUDITH, XIII, 23.

nity and as a consequence, of the sacred deposit of Christian Revelation. His exalted virtues are proclaimed not only by private testimony, but by the solemn Acts of the two General Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. Anxious to promote devotion to our blessed Lady and moved by zeal for the salvation of souls, St. Cyril had nothing more at heart than to preserve his flock from the lamentable heresies concerning the Divine Maternity of our blessed Lady, which at that time pervaded some of the eastern churches.

Cyril, being not less versed in sacred learning than exercised in every virtue, was sent by Pope St. Celestine to preside over the Council of Ephesus. In this great assembly the heresy of Nestorius was condemned and the dogma of the Divine Maternity of Our Lady was proclaimed. On this occasion St. Cyril poured forth his heart in a fervent prayer in honor of the Mother of God in the presence of all the bishops gathered for the occasion. This prayer is one of the most beautiful hymns of praise that has ever been composed in honor of the glorious Queen of Heaven.

But it was not long before the holy Bishop had to suffer for this deed, which drew down on him the implacable hatred of the heretics, from whom he had much to suffer. They ended by driving him out of his diocese. However, this did not prevent him from continuing to defend the

august dogma of the Divine Maternity of Mary by word and writing. He was only too happy to suffer for this truth; but Our Lady was not slow to recompense her faithful servant with an abundance of heavenly graces. At last, through her intercession, he was allowed to return to his See, where he was received with great joy by his people. He died a saintly death on the twenty-eighth of January, 444, his soul passing from earth to heaven to praise for all eternity the glorious Mother of God whom he had so honored during his lifetime.

PRAYER

O Mary, I believe with all my soul that thou art the true Mother of God, through whom the work of our salvation has been accomplished. Grant, I pray thee, that with this faith deeply rooted in my heart, and with the good works springing therefrom, I may surrender my soul to my Lord: do thou thyself present it before the throne of thy Divine Son, for "my life is in thy hand." ¹ Amen.

¹ Gen. XLVII, 25.

Holy Virgin of Virgins

PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY

"One is my dove: my perfect one is but one. She is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her. The daughters saw her and declared her most blessed: the queens . . . praised her." (CANT. VI, 8.)

AMONG all the privileges of the Blessed Virgin, one of the dearest to the heart of the faithful is her perpetual virginity. It was to preserve to His Mother this prerogative that God set aside the laws of nature, so that Mary became Mother of the Word, without loss of her virginity.

It was, then, by a signal miracle that Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world, was conceived of Mary. By another miracle not inferior to the former, He passed from the womb of this Divine Mother to the light of day. Thus the conception and birth of Jesus Christ, far from tarnishing this spotless lily, increased its whiteness and imparted to it the most fragrant perfume. In the same way that a ray of pure light passes through the limpid crystal without hurting it, but rather penetrating it with its own brilliance,

thus the Holy Spirit, covering with His shadow the most Holy Virgin, fashioned in her, from her very substance, the sacred body of Christ. God willed to honor in this manner His Mother; and Mary, on her side, corresponding to this excess of love, had but one wish, that of remaining always a Virgin.

Oh, how pleasing to God is holy virginity! By it man freely refrains from the base pleasures of sense, that he may thereby give himself to the contemplation of heavenly things with his whole heart. The virginity of the Mother of God is a most fragrant perfume which pervades the whole Church; hence do we sing of her: "Thou art happy, O Virgin Mary, who hast borne the Creator: thou hast engendered Him who created thee, yet remaining always a Virgin."¹

* * *

Mary was not merely content to practise the virtue of virginity: she would also consecrate it with a perpetual and absolute vow.

She made this vow when her parents presented her in the Temple. It was then that the Holy Spirit, the Spouse of her soul, inspired her to dedicate to God, by a perpetual promise, the sacred flower of her virginity. At the same time He gave her to understand how this vow

¹ Office of the Maternity of the Most Holy Virgin.

superadds a fresh excellence to the simple virtue, from the fact that it proceeds from a more exalted principle, that is, from religion, which renders us apt to faithfully perform the works belonging to the service of God.

Many holy persons had embraced the virginal state before Mary, but none had as yet bound themselves to it by vow; the first fruits of so excellent a practice being reserved for her, who was to be the dayspring of the New Law.

It was precisely this vow which, at the moment of the Annunciation, presented itself to Mary's mind as an obstacle to the accomplishment of the designs of Heaven: thus the words of the Angel were directed to enlighten her as to the manner of the mystery to be accomplished in her. By an unique privilege Mary, all the while remaining a Virgin, was to become Mother of the Word, thus coupling the flower of virginity with the glory of motherhood.

* * *

Our nature, when it first was tainted with original sin, contracted thenceforth a strong inclination for the pleasures of sense.

If then we would preserve our soul free from all spot, we must make this perverse inclination the object of daily combats. To this St. Paul alluded, when he cried out: "I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my

mind;"¹ and the same Apostle anxiously exclaimed: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"² But he soon regained confidence, adding: "The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord."³

Yes, the grace of God is the sole means whereby we may overcome the flesh and escape its seductions. It behoves us, however, to be always on our guard, avoiding whatsoever might bring the smallest taint to holy purity. What is especially necessary for the preservation of this virtue, is to eschew all frivolous and dangerous reading, which is oftentimes taken up under pretext of mental recreation, but which in reality opens the road to all sorts of moral disorders.

EXAMPLE

ST. ALEXIS FALCONIERI

Among the Seven Saints whom the Queen of Heaven chose as Founders of the Order of her Servants, there was one who rendered himself singularly illustrious by the perfection with which he strove to imitate the purity and humility of Mary. This was St. Alexis Falconieri. Born at the beginning of the thirteenth century

¹ ROM. VII, 23.

² *Ibid.* 24.

³ *Ibid.* 25.

of a rich and powerful family of Florence, he gave himself from his youth upward to the practice of works of piety, and distinguished himself especially for his devotion to the Queen of Virgins and for the great virtues he cultivated in her honor. Above all, he had most at heart to keep his purity untarnished so that he seemed less like a man than an angel.

In order the better to guard this precious virtue, he fled the allurements offered him by the world, giving himself, while still a young man, to prayer and works of penance. On account of his purity of mind and body he desired to be one of those privileged servants of God whom the Queen of Heaven deigned to summon to her service on the Feast of the Assumption, 1233. Having given himself entirely to the service of our blessed Lady, he endeavored to imitate her in the practice of humility and the mortification of the senses. He was particularly attentive to guard the chastity which he brought unimpaired to the religious life. In this way he strove to give pleasure to his heavenly Queen, whom he did not cease to honor and to compassionate in her bitter sorrows. So profound was his humility that he did not consent to be raised to the order of priesthood, thinking himself unworthy to consecrate and to give to the people the august Sacrament of the Altar.

St. Alexis Falconieri lived one hundred and ten years, a very long life indeed, full of good works and heavenly favors.

When on his death-bed he was honored, by a vision of the Holy Child Jesus, who laid on his head a crown of roses, while white doves, symbols of his stainless purity, were seen flying about the room. After having recited, as was his custom, one hundred Hail Marys, the old man died on February 17th, 1310, and his soul, adorned, as it is believed, with its baptismal innocence, went to receive in heaven the reward of its merits.

PRAYER

O Mary, treasure of chastity, and flower of Virgins, thou wouldst rather have renounced the dignity of Mother of God, than endure the loss of thy virginity. Obtain for me, I beseech thee, so to watch over my senses, that I may be always pleasing to Jesus Christ, thy Son, the King of virgins. Amen.

Mother of Christ

MARY THE LOVING MOTHER OF JESUS

"She brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger." (LUKE II, 7.)

LET us transport ourselves in thought to that solemn moment when Mary, having carried in her womb for nine months the Word of God made Man, brought him forth to the light of this world. Men took no heed to provide for the new-born King of heaven and earth a dwelling-place worthy of Him: a poor abandoned stable was all that this world had to offer to its Creator. But Mary's love made amends for this extreme poverty. Who can tell with what tenderness the blessed Mother laid her new-born Son in the crib? Who can measure the intensity of those shafts of love, so pure, so chaste, so generous, which burned in her heart?

O Jesus, from Thy first entrance into this world, the hardness and coldness of mankind already prepares for Thee that bitter cup, which Thou must drink for thirty-three years, until Thou drainest the last drop upon the cross. In return Thou shalt find in the love of Thy Holy

Mother an ample recompense. That love never wanes: on the contrary, it waxes in proportion as Thy sufferings increase and Thy pains grow more acute.

* * *

The love of the mother does not make Mary forget the humility of the servant. For she calls to mind that, by proclaiming herself the servant of the Most High, she was raised to the unequalled dignity of being Mother of God. Her first act at the birth of Jesus is to cast herself down before Him and adore in deepest humility her first-begotten Son, offering herself to Him as His slave. Mary adores in Jesus the world's Creator: she submits herself wholly to Him, and by this act of supreme submission and lowliest adoration, she makes to the Redeemer an honorable amend for the indifference and pride of men.

But it is to ransom mankind that Jesus came. Consequently Mary, from the first moment of the Incarnation, begins her office of Mediatrix, presenting to the Father this same Jesus, whom she has conceived, for the world's redemption, and offering herself to be with Him one victim of expiation. Thus the deliverance of man from the bondage of sin begins to be wrought out by the infinite merits of the Word Incarnate, to which are joined, not of necessity, but of superabundance, the merits of Mary.

Virgin most holy, I unite myself with thee in adoring Jesus, thy Son. I acknowledge Him for my King, and the King of the entire universe. In union with thee, I offer Him to the eternal Father for the remission of my own sins and those of the whole world.

* * *

The mystery of the birth of Christ, a mystery which carries with it for Mary the glorious title of "Mother of Christ," invites the Christian soul to give vent, in imitation of and in company with Mary, to pious sentiments of faith and wonder. To these sentiments ought to be joined a lively recognition of the benefits which the Incarnation has brought us.

Furthermore, we should endeavor to foster in our hearts a true and sincere love for that God who has loved us to such an extent, as to abase Himself in assuming our miserable nature and abandoning Himself, for love of us, to a life of sorrows and tears.

It is also our bounden duty to adore, with sentiments of profound humility, Him who, without losing anything of His infinite grandeur, has deigned to make Himself like unto us.

Moreover, we should offer our hearts to Jesus through Mary's hands, imploring this King of love to graciously accept the offering of all that we are and of all that we have, for time and eternity.

Above all, it behoves us to be on our guard against the insinuations of those who, whether by their harmful writings, or by their traitorous words, seek to lay snares for our faith, and so to deprive us of the great benefit of Redemption. Alas! how numberless are these emissaries of Satan, who wage ceaseless war upon the Christian, endeavoring to turn him away from his Master! In order to secure more surely their end, they do not blush to decry her who is the shortest way to come to Jesus, the glorious Virgin Mary, our Mother.

O my soul, guard with a jealous care the devotion thou hast to the Mother of God: this wholesome devotion will infallibly bring thee to salvation.

EXAMPLE

ST. ALPHONSUS RODRIGUEZ

Among the saints whom our blessed Lady seems to have particularly favored, St. Alphonsus Rodriguez deserves special mention. He was born in Segovia, a small town of Spain, and was, from his boyhood, so adorned with virtues, that it was easy to foresee to what heights of holiness he would one day attain. Above all, his devotion to Our Lady seemed to have been born with him. From his tenderest

years he felt drawn to love and serve her and this good Mother did not cease to lavish graces and favors on him.

One day in the transport of his fervor, he spoke thus to the Mother of God: "O heavenly Lady, I do love thee. Would to God that thou also loved me thus." To which Mary made answer: "It is not as thou sayest, O my son; for the love I bear thee, is greater than the love thou bearest me."

In the midst of worldly affairs in which he was engaged by his mother's will, the love of Jesus and Mary was what always upheld him and finally detached him from everything on earth. Moreover, Our Lord Himself, in a vision, bade him follow Him more closely; and this he did by becoming a lay-brother in the Society of Jesus. In this vocation he exercised the most heroic virtues, especially patience and charity, keeping himself always united to God in prayer, so that he could say with the Apostle: "For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God."¹

To what degree of sanctity St. Alphonsus Rodriguez rose, is proved by the fact that his Superiors were bound to restrain the ardor of his charity, which had found expression in over-severe penances. From his devotion to Jesus and Mary he drew the needful strength to withstand the hard temptations which it pleased God

¹ COL. III, 8.

to let him undergo. In his last illness he had the consolation of being visited by Our Lady and her Divine Son. Gladdened by the sweet converse of Jesus and Mary, he ended his days uttering these Holy Names, on the thirtieth of October, 1617. He was canonized ¹ by Leo XIII, at the same time as the Seven Holy Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, on the fifteenth of January, 1888.

PRAYER

O Blessed Mother, do thou thyself offer to thy Son Jesus my sentiments of love, adoration and self-surrender. Obtain that I may persevere in these sentiments even unto death, so that I may come to enjoy in heaven the ineffable vision of God, my Redeemer, the first beginning and the last end of all things. Amen.

¹ Acta Leonis, Vol. VIII, pp. 86, foll.

Mother of Divine Grace

MARY FULL OF GRACE

"A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."
(APOC., XII, 1.)

OF ALL the gifts which may enrich an intelligent being, none is greater, more precious or more desirable than grace. This divine gift we owe to the merits of our Saviour, a gift which makes man the friend of God, brother of Jesus Christ, and heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. It makes us in some sort sharers in the Godhead, according to the words of St. Peter: "By whom He hath given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature."¹

As Mary was destined to become Mother of the Author of grace, she must needs have been herself enriched with this gift, in a degree superior to that of all other creatures. For this reason, at the moment of her conception, she was exempted from every stain of sin, and was endowed with an abundance of grace, above that

¹ 2 PETER, I, 4.

which any of the saints ever possessed. And this grace went on always increasing to such a degree, that when Mary left this world, her grace surpassed that of all the saints put together. Thus, the words of Holy Scripture are particularly applicable to her: "The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day." ¹.

O Mary, what can I say of the beauties of thy soul enriched with the ineffable gift of grace? Thou art in truth an object of infinite complacency to God, who sees in thee the purest reflection of the perfections of Jesus Christ!

* * *

In calling Mary "Mother of divine grace" we do not mean to say that she of herself bestows upon men this priceless gift. To impart grace is proper to God alone, who is the King of glory, immortal and invisible. To Him only belongs by right of dominion this supernatural good: none but He is its primary dispenser.

However, the distribution of the treasure of grace is regulated by wise and provident laws. Just as the princes of the earth have ministers to distribute their largess, so also the King of Heaven has willed that His riches should be distributed by the sage bounty of her who, by privilege, has received the plenitude thereof. She

¹ PROV. IV, 18.

intercedes as a Daughter, she commands as a Mother; and at her voice the gifts of Heaven are lavished upon men. It is not therefore for herself only that Mary is full of grace, she is so, on our account as well; and this is the precise meaning of the glorious title with which the voice of the Christian people at large loves to call her: "Mother of divine grace."

* * *

Mother of divine grace! Could the piety of the faithful have chosen for our heavenly Queen a more glorious title?

Is it not by the aid of Mary that the princes of the earth, whilst holding firm the reins of government, know how to procure for their subjects peace and prosperity? "By Me kings reign."¹ Is it not by her favor that wise lawgivers make truth and justice to prevail in their states? "By me lawgivers decree just things."² In fine, is it not by and through Mary that sinners obtain their return to grace, and the just their final perseverance?

Yes! all the benefits of conversion, of sanctification and of salvation which God has granted or shall ever grant to men, from the first grace of repentance given to Adam after his fall, down to that grace of final perseverance which shall secure the heavenly kingdom to the last of God's

¹ PROV. VIII, 15.

² *Ibid.*

elect, must come from Jesus Christ by the mediation of Mary.

Indeed, how eloquent are those countless ex-votos, which in the sanctuaries of Mary testify to the gratitude of the faithful toward this Divine Mother, for the graces they have received by her intercession! Ah, let those fly to Mary with all confidence who feel the need of the succors of grace: this Mother so full of mercy will never abandon them.

EXAMPLE

ST. BERNARDINE OF SIENA

How much our blessed Lady loves to share with her devout clients, the graces with which it has pleased Our Lord to endow her is shown in the life of St. Bernardine of Siena. From his earliest youth this Apostle of the Holy Name of Jesus began to show especial devotion to the glorious Queen of Heaven. Every Saturday he fasted in her honor, and showed her every sign of affection and veneration. This benign Mother, on the other hand, did not let herself be outdone in generosity and was pleased to adorn the soul of her faithful servant with the choicest graces, in preparation for the mission to which Bernardine had been predestined by God.

His devotion to our blessed Lady increased in

him with his years. It is stated that every day he used to go to a gate of the city of Siena called the Porta Camollia and there prostrate himself before a fresco of the Madonna. This he did without any regard for the opinions of other people, giving free scope to his affection and calling Our Lady his delight and own beloved. His confidence in the patronage of the Mother of grace was not frustrated, since he thus escaped the dangers of this corrupt world. He had long wished to enter the Order of the Friars Minor and at last this privilege was granted him.

Having been bidden by his Superiors to preach in the different cities of Italy and to call people back to the practices of a Christian life, he obtained, owing to the intercession of our blessed Lady, the marvelous cure of a long-standing defect in his voice, which had been the result of an illness from which he had much to suffer. The cities whither he was sent to preach were full of evil-living and bloodshed; but the Blessed Virgin, under whose patronage he placed the issue of his apostolic labors, helped him visibly. Words cannot express how many sinners were converted and how many souls were sanctified by him. At his preaching, the erring were recalled, scandals ceased, and feuds were ended; and these apostolic journeys of his could indeed be called triumphs of grace over sin. In the end, worn out by fatigue and penance, he died a happy

death on the twentieth of May, 1445, receiving from our blessed Lord the eternal recompense he had merited especially by his filial devotion to our blessed Lady.

PRAYER

O Mary, who for our sakes didst conceive Jesus, the Author and Dispenser of grace, and who wast enriched above all creatures with this precious gift, turn upon us, we beseech thee, thy glance of maternal love. Obtain for us from the infinite bounty of thy Son, a large share of this celestial treasure, in order that we may be always pleasing to God, and may reign with Him for all eternity. Amen.

Mother Most Pure

MARY'S DETACHMENT FROM THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD

*"All the glory of the King's daughter is within
in golden borders, clothed round about with
varieties."* (Ps. XLIV, 14.)

OF ALL earthly goods, honor is that which is generally the most esteemed. By its nature, honor is the fitting reward of virtue, to the acquisition of which it acts as an incentive. But it becomes a danger, whenever it is sought by unlawful means, or when we attribute it exclusively to ourselves, that is, without reference to God, the source of all true honor. The example of Mary is the shining light which should rule our conduct in this respect.

Chosen amongst all creatures to be Mother of the Word Incarnate, hailed "full of grace" by the Angel Gabriel, proclaimed by St. Elizabeth "blessed among all women," Mary was in no wise puffed up, but she referred to God the praises given to herself. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour; because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." ¹

¹ LUKE, I, 46-48.

Jesus came upon this earth not to be honored but to be humbled and despised, so as to seem "a worm and no man: the reproach of men and the outcast of the people."¹ After the example of Jesus, Mary, during the whole public life of her Son, fled honors, and appeared in His company only to share with Him the cup of bitterness and scorn: "The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me."²

* * *

The soul which fears God and is anxious to procure His glory only, does not shun humiliations; on the contrary, it accepts them with resignation and joy. And together with humiliations it embraces also voluntary poverty. It knows that riches are, of their own nature, an impediment to charity, by minstering to sensuality, by keeping the soul back from the service of God, and blunting its sense of dependence upon Him.

Furthermore, riches tend to make the practice of charity very difficult, that divine virtue being incompatible with attachment to worldly goods. For this reason, our divine Saviour has taught us that the renunciation of the goods of this world is the foundation upon which the perfection of charity rests; and, to unite example with

¹ Ps. **XXI.** 7.

² Ibid. **LXVIII,** 10.

precept, He Himself "being rich, became poor for our sakes."¹

Mary, therefore, although born of royal blood, lived with her faithful spouse St. Joseph, in the greatest poverty. She earned her daily bread by the labor of her hands. Nay more, at the time of the birth of Jesus, her poverty was so great, that she and St. Joseph could find no place in the inns of the town. The Creator of the world must be laid in a rough manger. But Mary's burning love is ample compensation for the poverty of the crib.

O holy poverty, so despised, yet withal so dear to the Heart of Jesus, who has said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit!"² Oh, that I may make thee mine; that treading under foot the goods of this world, I may aspire only to the imperishable goods of eternity!

* * *

The soul that would preserve in itself the fear of God, should take heed lest a disordered attachment to honors and riches may estrange it from the path of virtue. When we seriously reflect that earthly glory is a transitory thing, and that the goods of this world are of short duration, we can experience no difficulty in despising what is incapable of procuring us true happiness.

¹ 2 COR. VIII, 9.

² MATT. V, 3.

In order that our hearts may be filled with the love of God, they must be emptied of all earthly attachment. But, further, the soul that would be truly pleasing to Jesus will go beyond this: it will renounce with generosity all the goods of this world, and will embrace the humility and poverty of the cross.

Happy the disciple of Christ, who knows how to tread honors and riches beneath his feet! Together with divine charity, the fear of God will dwell in him, as pledge of a blessed eternity.

EXAMPLE

BLESSED FRANCIS PATRIZI

Blessed Francis Patrizi of Siena seemed predestined to become one of the greatest Servants of Mary. Even before his birth, his mother Reginalda dreamt that she was begetting a most beautiful lily which would adorn the image of Our Lady. As a child he began the habit of often saying five hundred Hail Marys at a time making as many genuflections before the statue of the Queen of Heaven.

At the age of twenty he had a wonderful vision. Our blessed Lady herself appeared to him surrounded by angels and tenderly invited him to consecrate himself entirely to her service in the Order of her Servants. Having complied with

Mary's wish, he began to make extraordinary progress in sanctity under the guidance of St. Philip Benizi. When he became a priest he had nothing more at heart than to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass with living faith and devotion.

Penetrated by the greatness of his vocation as a Servant of Mary, he gave himself up, with all the ardor of his soul, to the service of Our Lady, urging every one, both from the confessional and the pulpit, to love and serve faithfully this celestial Queen. By this means, he succeeded in leading many souls to the highest degree of sanctity. All the time he had left over from his ministry, he spent in increasing his prayers, especially in saying the Hail Mary and in singing the praises of our blessed Lady.

Such piety could not go unrewarded. One day, as Francis was going to preach in a neighboring village, and feeling too tired to reach his destination, he sat by the wayside to take a little rest. The Queen of Heaven then appeared to him in the guise of a noble lady and gave him a bunch of fresh roses, the fragrance of which comforted him. But he felt that his end was drawing near. When about to die, he again had the consolation of seeing our blessed Lady, who appeared to him in all her splendor, summoning him to paradise. Full of virtues and merits, he died on the Feast of the Ascen-

sion, 1328, saying the words of Christ on the cross: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

After his death, a beautiful lily sprang from his mouth bearing on its leaves the legend *Ave Maria*, an evident witness and everlasting sign of the pleasure taken by the Queen of Heaven in the numberless and fervent acts of worship and reverence offered to her by this most faithful of her Servants.¹

PRAYER

O Mary, whose most pure Heart was exempt from all disorderly attachment to honors and wealth, and so burned always with the most lively flame of charity, obtain for us, after thine example, to tread under foot all earthly honor, and so to despise riches, that we may preserve always within us the holy fear of God. Amen.

¹ Monumenta Ord. Serv. B.M.V.

Mother Most Chaste

THE CONCEPTION OF JESUS CHRIST BY THE OPERATION OF THE HOLY GHOST

"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, and therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

(LUKE, I, 35.)

THE Incarnation of the Word is not only a mystery of our Faith, it is also the greatest miracle that the power of God has ever accomplished.

Nothing, in fact, more surpasses the powers of nature, than the union of a Person, divine, uncreated and infinite, with created and finite human nature. But God willed that another stupendous miracle should be added to the first: namely, the virginal conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary, who, by an altogether singular privilege was visited by the Holy Ghost. The power of the Most High covered her with His shadow, in order that she might conceive and bring forth the very Word of God.

As there can be no higher dignity in a pure creature, than that of coöperating immediately

with the Holy Ghost in forming the body of a God, so it is not to be wondered at that God should set aside the laws of nature in order to safeguard the virginity of His Mother.

Wonder unspeakable! How dearly it makes known to us the love of the Holy Spirit for His Spouse; and how it enhances in our sight the sublime dignity of the Mother of God!

* * *

The virginal conception of Jesus Christ in Mary's womb, like every other wonderful work of God, must be ascribed to the common operation of the Three Divine Persons, who having the same nature, unite in all their works *ad extra*. However, it is to the Holy Ghost that we attribute this virginal conception, and that for several reasons.

In the first place, the Incarnation is a work of love, since God became Man because of the love He bore us; now the Holy Ghost is precisely, in the Holy Trinity, the consubstantial love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father.

Moreover, by its union with the Word, the most holy Humanity of Jesus became the greatest marvel of spiritual perfection, having been raised, ennobled and made glorious above all created things by the light of the Godhead: now, it is to the Holy Spirit that we attribute the

work of grace, and all the fruits of sanctification flowing therefrom.

Finally, the Incarnation had for its end the redemption of the human race, which Jesus Christ was to admit to participation in the graces, whereof He possessed the fulness. Now, this sanctification, which has its origin in Jesus Christ, is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit. It is just, therefore, that we attribute the accomplishment of this great mystery to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

For these reasons, Mary is the chosen temple, the unique sanctuary of the Holy Ghost: a sanctuary so beautiful, so rich in divine gifts, that all other sanctuaries pale in comparison.

Rejoice, O my soul, that such blessings have come to us by the operation of the Holy Ghost in Mary. Repeat with a holy exultation these words wherewith the Heavenly Bridegroom delighted to address this incomparable Mother: "Thou art a garden enclosed, my sister, my spouse; thou art a sealed fountain: thy plants are a paradise of delights."¹

* * *

The virginal conception of Jesus Christ in Mary's womb, not only brings to the fore the doctrine of the Divine Maternity together with that of the Divinity of Jesus Christ, but it is

¹ CANT. IV, 12-13.

also an eloquent proof that, beyond the natural order, there exists a supernatural life, which is the end of all things created.

For, if God willed that such a miraculous intervention of the Holy Ghost should take place in the conception of the Redeemer of mankind, we can deduce from this fact that the scope of the Incarnation is beyond all that the order of nature comprehends. In fact, Jesus Christ became Man in order to give us grace in this life and the recompense of glory in the next.

Let us give thanks to the Holy Ghost for His having overshadowed Mary and thereby having given to ourselves the knowledge of this great truth: that we are made for heaven, and for heaven alone.

EXAMPLE

ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY

St. Elizabeth, daughter of Andrew II, King of Hungary, and wife of Ludwig, Landgrave of Thuringia, was from her earliest youth most devout to the glorious Queen of Heaven. She always took delight in venerating her and in causing her to be venerated by all with whom she came in contact. She never wearied of saying the Angelical Salutation in honor of the Mother of God.

Among the virtues most conspicuous in St. Elizabeth, was her love of holy poverty. This she learnt in the school of our blessed Lady herself, for the Queen of heaven and earth practiced poverty during the whole of her mortal life. This spirit of poverty inspired St. Elizabeth with so great a scorn for earthly possessions, that she detested all that was not strictly necessary, and would not even retain what was befitting her dignity as queen. Once, on the Feast of the Assumption, while assisting at the solemn Mass, she took off her royal crown before all the bystanders and pushing away the cushions set for her, knelt on the bare ground, declaring that such adornments were not befitting a servant of Jesus Christ, seeing that He, the King of heaven and earth, had always lived poorly and died crowned with bitter thorns.

After her husband's death, Elizabeth underwent the fiercest persecutions. Through the envy and hatred of the great nobles, it was spread about that by her almsgiving she had wasted the Crown treasury. On this account she was driven from the court, exposed to every sort of insult, and finally obliged to take refuge in a little hut, where she suffered terribly from hunger and the severity of the weather. In the midst of these tribulations, always borne with heroic patience, she was lovingly helped by our blessed Lady, her sweet Patroness, who even

deigned to appear to her and speak to her.

At last, St. Elizabeth was restored to her original dignity. But instead of peacefully enjoying the pleasures and honors of her rank, she turned her back on all the things of the world and asked to be clothed in the poor habit of St. Francis. For the rest of her life she never ceased to exercise herself in the practice of penance and humility. At last, invited by her heavenly Spouse to the wedding-feast of paradise, she exchanged the tears of her exile for the joys of heaven, dying at Marburg, in Germany, on the nineteenth of November, 1231.

PRAYER

Glorious Virgin, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, wonder of the universe, I praise and exalt thee because of the matchless conception of Jesus Christ in thy virginal womb. Grant, I pray thee, that keeping always bright within me the lamp of faith, I may inherit one day the promises made to those who serve thy Son with fidelity. Amen.

Mother Inviolata

GIFT OF FEAR IN MARY

*"If I have found favor in thy sight, O king,
and if it please thee, give me my life for which
I ask, and my people, for which I request."*

(ESTH. VII, 3.)

THE HOLY GHOST teaches us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."¹ This fear is not that servile movement which has for its object the chastisement due to sin; it is a sentiment of filial piety, grounded on the one hand on the greatness and majesty of God, and on the other on the deformity of sin.

Servile fear may be found even among those who do not love God, whom the dread of punishment alone keeps back from offending their Lord and Master. Speaking of this fear St. John says that perfect charity casts it out.²

On the other hand, filial fear belongs to God's children. These recognize the Most High for their Sovereign Lord, and love Him as their tender Father; hence they have for Him a profound esteem and veneration. Knowing that

¹ Ps. cx, 10.

² 1 JOHN, IV, 18.

they are exposed in this life to a thousand occasions of offending Him, by reason of the temptations they must undergo through the frailty of the flesh, the malice of the demon, and the allurements of the world, they fear sin above every other evil.

Lord, give me, I beseech Thee, an ample share of this salutary fear, according as Thou hast said: "I will give my fear in their heart."¹

* * *

Mary, at the moment of her Immaculate Conception, received, together with the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, that of the fear of God. This fear in her was in no sort servile. Filled as she was with divine grace, altogether pure and holy, what chastisement could she apprehend?

Neither was there in Mary, properly speaking, that fear which theologians call "chaste fear," which has for its object the possible danger of falling away from God by sin; for she well knew that by an especial assistance of the Holy Ghost, she would never lose divine grace.

The fear of God was, therefore, in Mary a reverential fear, caused by a keen and lively sense of the awful majesty of the Most High and His limitless power. It was this very sentiment which impelled this glorious Virgin to believe with all her heart the truths revealed

¹ JER. XXXII, 40.

by God: to consecrate to the Lord all the affections of her soul: to shelter herself and rest, like a white dove, under the fatherly wings of Divine Providence: "I sat down under His shadow, whom I desired." ¹

* * *

The chief effect of the gift of fear in Mary was to inspire her, in her adorations and supplications, with so great a sense of respect and veneration for the Divine Majesty, that all her petitions merited to be heard: even as we read of Jesus, that He "was heard for His reverence." ² Mary might, therefore, like another Esther, present herself without fear before the throne of the King of kings, and lay her request at His feet, with a certain confidence of being fully heard, whatever the object of her petition might be.

Oh, that we would imitate Mary in the acquisition and exercise of this precious gift of the fear of God! That our prayers might be animated with this reverential and wholesome fear, which is the pledge of divine favors, for it is written that God "will do the will of them that fear Him: and He will hear their prayer." ³ Would that we dreaded above all things to commit sin, the greatest of evils, and that we might

¹ CANT. II, 8.

² HEB. V, 7.

³ PS. CXLIV, 19.

courageously shun all the occasions of offending our Heavenly Father and losing His grace!

Happy the soul that possesses this salutary fear, the beneficial effect of which is felt especially at the moment of death. For such a soul does not dread the passage from life to eternity: on the contrary, it looks upon that moment as the beginning of all real blessings. "With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed."¹

EXAMPLE

ST. ILDEPHONSUS

One of the most strenuous champions of the perpetual virginity of the most holy Mother of God was St. Ildephonsus, Archbishop of Toledo, in Spain. His birth, which took place in the year 606, was the effect of a special grace of Mary. He came to this world on the eighth of December, which is the day that was afterward consecrated to the Immaculate Conception of our blessed Lady. When but ten years old, he was placed under the direction of St. Isidore of Seville, that he might learn, besides human science, the virtues necessary in a minister of the Lord.

¹ ECLUS. I, 13.

After ten years he returned to his country, where, following the impulse of the Holy Spirit, notwithstanding the opposition of his parents, he withdrew into solitude, entering the monastery of Sts. Cosmas and Damian. A short time after, the splendor of his religious virtues moved his brethren to elect him Superior. Later, he was raised to the dignity of Archbishop, succeeding Eugenius in the See of Toledo.

Spain at that time was infested by a crowd of Arian heretics, who taught that Jesus Christ was not equal to His Father but only an adopted Son, and that therefore Mary was not the Mother of God but an ordinary woman. These men, following the false teaching of Elvidius, strove to deprive the Queen of Heaven of the halo of perpetual virginity. Ildephonsus directed all his pastoral care against this nefarious doctrine, and proved both by writing and preaching that Jesus Christ is truly God, equal to the Father, and that Mary is the most holy Mother of God, and yet always a Virgin.

Such zeal, if it excited the wrath of Ildephonsus' enemies, was however not unrewarded by God. One day as Ildephonsus was praying at the tomb of St. Leocadia in the presence of a large multitude of the faithful, among whom was the King Recesvintus, the stone which covered the sacred remains of this virgin, was suddenly lifted and the Saint coming forth from the tomb ad-

dressed the holy Bishop, exclaiming: "O Ildephonsus, through thee is my Mistress living." By that, St. Leocadia wished to show how efficacious was the preaching of Ildephonsus for preserving faith and devotion to Mary in the hearts of the people, despite the calumny of the heretics. As witness of this wonderful apparition and to confirm the truth which Ildephonsus had defended, St. Leocadia invited him to detach a small piece of the white veil which covered her head, and this is preserved to the present day as a precious relic in the cathedral of Toledo. St. Ildephonsus died on the twenty-third of January, 667.

PRAYER

O Mary, it was by a special grace of the Holy Ghost that thou wast made sinless during thy mortal life, and that thou wert animated with such a veneration for the Divine Majesty, that thou didst merit to be heard in all thy prayers. Present, I beseech thee, special petitions to the Most High, that I may ever keep alive in me this gift of salutary fear, in order that I may avoid sin, and come to eternal blessedness. Amen.

Mother Undeified

MARY EXEMPT FROM ALL ACTUAL SIN

"For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it."

SAP., VII, 29.)

THE revolt of our first parents against the law of God marked for them the beginning of a painful and humiliating conflict of sense against reason, of the flesh against the spirit. This conflict from which no son of Adam is free, requires, on the part of the soul, continual vigilance and generous endeavors to avoid sin: "For the flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh."¹

The concupiscence within us is the cause of numberless venial sins. It may even become, if we do not combat it, the source of deadly falls. Our lot, then, is indeed most pitiable, and St. Paul had reason to exclaim: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"²

But thanks be to God, who has procured for

¹ GAL. V, 17.

² ROM. VII, 24.

our weakness an unfailing support, for which we must be eternally grateful to Him: this is divine grace, by which we can avoid every mortal fault, and moreover keep ourselves free from venial transgressions, if not for the whole course of our life, at least for lengthy periods. This grace is even so fruitful, that besides the strength it gives us to resist concupiscence, it also furnishes us with a potent means for increasing merit. "God," says St. Paul, "will make also with temptation issue." ²

* * *

Mary, having contracted no stain of original sin, was thereby free from that concupiscence which is its fruit, and which consists in the rebellion of the inferior part of the soul against the superior. She therefore felt in herself no inclination, except for what was comformable to reason and grace. Consequently, she never committed the slightest venial sin, which consists in the rebellion of our unrulèd passions against the law of reason. Further, by an altogether special privilege, Mary's will was so assisted by the Holy Spirit, that it was never alienated from God by mortal sin. It is therefore the privilege of our Queen to have been exempted from all stain of sin, even the slightest, during the whole course of her mortal career.

² 1 COR. x, 13.

Oh, how Jesus delighted in the soul of His Holy Mother! What unutterable sweetness He experienced in her! With what transports of love He would say to her: "Behold thou art fair, O my love, behold thou art fair."¹ "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee."² "Thou art beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely."³

Be thou praised and thanked, O Lord, for having given to Thy Son Jesus Christ, a Mother so pure and holy, whose converse was for Him a never-failing source of consolation in the sorrows and pains of His mortal life, and an ample compensation for man's ingratitude.

* * *

Mary's sinlessness during her mortal life differs from the impeccability of the saints in heaven. These, by reason of the vision of the Divine Essence, which they behold face to face, are incapable of sin: whilst Mary, who was not in possession of the beatific vision, absolutely speaking, might have fallen from divine grace. But she had this advantage over the Blessed in heaven, that her sinlessness did not prevent her from acquiring merits, whilst the saints in heaven can no longer do so.

Indeed, though Mary did not feel, as we do,

¹ CANT. I, 14.

² *Ibid.* IV, 7.

³ *Ibid.* VI, 8.

the temptations of the flesh, nor experience the difficulties which we encounter in performing acts of virtue, nevertheless, her merits went on continually increasing to an inconceivable extent during her whole mortal life. Merit is increased in proportion to the ardor of the will, and Mary's will was ever prompt to execute the commands of God, howsoever difficult they might be. The Holy Mother of God being without shadow of sin, and being in all her actions prompted by the most fervent charity, was able, as theology teaches, to merit for man *de congruo* all that Jesus Christ, by His passion and death, merited for us *de condigno*.

EXAMPLE

ST. JULIANA FALCONIERI

One of those souls who applied themselves especially to imitate the spotless purity of the Mother of God, was without doubt the illustrious Foundress of the Mantellate Sisters of the Servants of Mary, St. Juliana, a descendant of the powerful Falconieri family of Florence, born in the second half of the thirteenth century.

During her childhood, her whole personality breathed forth such candor and modesty, that her uncle St. Alexis, one of the Seven Holy Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary,

used to say to her mother that she had given birth to an angel rather than to a child. So great was her horror of sin, that at its bare mention she trembled from head to foot, and one day when she heard tell of some offense against God, she fell down in a swoon.

When only fourteen, she made a vow of perpetual virginity before the miraculous picture of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence. In order to keep herself always pure and spotless, she afflicted her body with disciplines and hair-shirts, so much so, that these latter became embedded in her flesh. Such virtues could not but arouse the hatred of the infernal enemy, who attacked her with all manner of fierce temptations, but the holy servant of Mary used to repeat: "My Jesus, cast me into hell, but do not permit me to offend Thee!"

So great was the sanctity of Juliana, that, as we read in the Bull of her Canonization, she did not commit any deliberate venial sin throughout her whole life. The secret of such holiness is to be found in her ardent devotion to the sorrows of Mary. Every day she recited a thousand Hail Marys before Our Lady's altar. From this devotion there grew in her heart a deep love for Jesus Crucified. She was wont to exclaim: "Let no one ever take away from me my Loved One Crucified."

No doubt it was owing to this great devotion,

that Juliana merited the singular grace which crowned her life. In her last extremity, she desired to receive Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, but not being able to do this on account of an excessive weakness caused by fasting, she begged the priest at least to place the Sacred Host on a linen cloth over her heart. Her wish was complied with, and lo! as soon as the Sacred Host was placed near to that furnace of divine love, It disappeared and Juliana gave up her soul into the hands of her Lord, exclaiming: "O my Jesus!" This remarkable death took place on the nineteenth of June, 1341.

PRAYER

O Mary, Mother of Our Redeemer, Immaculate Virgin, temple of God, and sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, thou art the sole creature who in such a manner wast pleasing to Jesus Christ, that He associated thee in the work of our ransom. Grant me, I beseech thee, to flee sin, and never to seek anything but the good pleasure of God. Amen.

Mother Most Amiable

MARY MOTHER OF MEN

"When Jesus, therefore, had seen His Mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His Mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that, He saith to the disciple: Behold thy Mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own." (JOHN, XIX, 26, 27.)

IT WAS when Mary brought forth her Divine Son to the light of day, that she became our spiritual Mother. It was impossible that she should be the Mother of Jesus, without being our Mother as well, for He is the head and we are His members.

Later, Jesus would Himself sanction, by a solemn utterance, this special dignity of Mary. Hanging upon the cross on Calvary, and on the point of rendering His soul to God, He turned suddenly to Mary. Indicating to her St. John, He said: "Woman, behold thy son"; and to St. John referring to Mary: "Behold thy Mother." Here was the testament of the Saviour of the world.

It is impossible to imagine anything more touching than this consecration, the solemnity

of which is enhanced by the circumstances of time and place, as well as by the witnesses that are present. The hour chosen by Jesus is that of His consummation of the Great Sacrifice upon the cross, and of that of Mary in her own heart: the place is Calvary, where the Divine Victim hangs dying: the witnesses are men themselves, of whom Mary becomes Mother.

I thank thee, O my sweet Jesus, for having thus thought of me in the moment of Thine agony, and for having so loved me, as to give me Thine own Mother according to the flesh, as my spiritual Mother.

* * *

The words of Jesus, like the sacraments, produce that which they signify: those which the Saviour uttered on the Cross consecrated Mary as our Mother, and inspired her soul with every tenderest and most exquisite maternal affection toward us.

Mary's motherly care embraces all. Beginning with those who were present on Calvary, she obtained for several of them, especially for the good thief, the grace of conversion and eternal life. The first Christians found also in Mary a Mother ever ready to console, to protect and instruct them in the knowledge of those mysteries, in which she herself had had so conspicuous a part.

And after her departure from this world, Mary ceased not to show men this same maternal affection. Her love is over us all, fostering us as her dear children. She defends us against our enemies both visible and invisible. She guards us in danger. She consoles us in affliction. She guides and instructs us in the affair of our salvation. In a word, the kindness, the care, the watchfulness of Mary in our regard, are so great, that no one is a stranger to her benefits. It is even a common teaching in the Church, that God grants no grace, except through Mary's intercession. We may, therefore, truly apply to this Blessed Mother the words of Divine Wisdom: "All good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands."¹

Rejoice, O my soul, that God has appointed thee so loving a Mother as Mary, who is able to aid thee in the difficulties of this life, and to bring thee to the harbor of eternal peace.

* * *

In appointing Mary to be Mother of men, God inspired her soul with the tenderest feelings of which motherly love is capable. So also in making us her children, He infused into our hearts the purest sentiments of love and veneration that sons can have toward their mother. These sentiments, then, are the work of that

¹ WISD. VII, 11.

Divine Spirit, "who is the pledge of our inheritance,"¹ and through whom we "have received the adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father)."²

Just, therefore, as we have a full confidence in God our Father, who loves us and cares for all our needs, so also we should have a boundless trust in Mary's powerful help. And this trust should be accomplished by those same sentiments of love, reverence and submission which a dutiful child entertains toward its mother.

Let our care be to love, honor and exalt Mary, our loving Mother, in such a manner that she may recognize us as her true children, and may be able to say of us: "These are my sons, whom God hath given me."³

EXAMPLE

ST. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque was born of pious and honest parents in Vérosvres, a small village of Burgundy in France, on the twenty-second of July, in the year 1647.

From her earliest years she was visited by God with extraordinary favors, from which it

¹ EPH. I, 14.

² ROM. VIII, 15.

³ GEN. XLVIII, 9.

was apparent that she was destined to perform some great work for the Church. When she had barely come to the age of reason, she manifested a great horror of sin, and at the same time an ardent desire of solitude, to which was united a special love of holy purity. So great was her fear of offending God, even by venial sin, that if she suspected this danger in any of her actions, she desisted from performing the same.

As Margaret Mary advanced in piety, she felt herself drawn in a very special way to honor the most holy Mother of God. In fact, she narrates this of herself: "I had recourse to Mary in my every want, and through her I was delivered from the greatest dangers. Not daring to address myself directly to her Divine Son, I had recourse to her and used to recite the Rosary in her honor, on bare knees, genuflecting at each Hail Mary and frequently kissing the ground." It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if, through this devotion to the most holy Mother of God, Margaret was found worthy of that great vocation to which God had destined her, namely, of spreading far and wide throughout the world the devotion to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

When Margaret Mary entered the monastery of Paray-le-Monial, she strove to become more united to her Divine Spouse, by the purity of her life and the endeavor to please Him in all things. Therefore Our Lord appeared to her

several times, revealing to her how it was His will that devotion to His most Sacred Heart, should be spread throughout all the world, as a beneficent river to enliven the human race, withered with the leprosy of sin, and how she herself was chosen by Him for this great work.

St. Margaret faithfully corresponded to the invitation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in a short time the monastery of the Visitation, where she lived, became the center of this Devotion, now so widespread and so dear to the hearts of all Christian people. St. Margaret Mary died on the seventeenth of October, 1690, and was canonized by Pope Benedict XV in 1920.

PRAYER

O Mary, I firmly believe that thou hast been given us as our Mother, by the voice of thy Son hanging upon the Cross, and that thou never ceaseest to act toward us the part of a most tender Mother. Obtain for us so to respond to thy love, that we may merit to be ever thy devoted children. Amen.

Mother Most Admirable

DUTIES OF JESUS TOWARD MARY

"Then Bethsabee came to king Solomon; . . . and the king arose to meet her, and bowed to her, and sat down upon his throne; and a throne was set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right hand." (3 KINGS, II, 19.)

THE Word having become Man by taking to Himself a human body in the womb of the ever Blessed Virgin, pledged Himself thereby to fulfill toward His beloved Mother all the duties of the best of sons.

The first of these duties is love. It is chiefly by love that a son seeks to repay his parents' affection. Who then can tell the ardor of that love which burned in the Heart of the Infant Jesus toward His Blessed Mother? Who can count the treasures of grace with which that adorable Son inundated the soul of His Immaculate Mother from the very first moment of His mortal life? Even in His sleep, Jesus thought of His Mother whom He enriched with His choicest gifts: "I sleep and my heart watcheth."¹

¹ LANT. V, 2.

But it was at the time of His passion, that Jesus manifested His love toward Mary in a way altogether singular, for His last thought was directed to entrusting His Holy Mother to the beloved disciple.

To such love Mary responded by a boundless love toward her Son, and this mutual love begun here below, formed the bond which unites those two Hearts now in heaven so closely, that they are as it were but one Heart: "My beloved to me and I to him."¹

* * *

The reverence which Jesus showed to Mary during His earthly life, was equal to His love for her. It was not merely His own quality of Son which impelled Him to venerate Mary: it was also the acknowledgment of the sublime privileges and extraordinary sanctity wherewith the Virgin's soul was adorned.

The incomparable dignity of Mary, the absence of all sin in her and the presence of the choicest graces in her soul, were for Jesus so many motives for thus especially honoring His Mother. Thus, the Son of God teaches us by His own example, with what respect we should treat our Heavenly Queen.

We find a symbol of the veneration which Jesus had for Mary, in the act of deference of

¹ *Ibid.* II, 16.

King Solomon toward his mother Bethsabée. As she was going to him in order to petition a favor of him, Solomon rose up and went forward to meet his mother: then bowing before her, he ordered a throne to be placed for her, and seated her at his right hand. Thus Jesus honors Mary, His Mother, seating her at His right hand, and sharing with her the love and honor which men have for Himself. "The Queen stood on thy right hand in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety." ¹

It is a great thing indeed that both angels and men should pay homage to Mary, proclaiming her Queen of heaven and earth. But it passes all comprehension that God Himself should deign to lavish such singular tokens of esteem and veneration upon this marvelous and most excellent creature.

* * *

Not only did Jesus love Mary with a most profound love, showing her a respect in accordance with her dignity, but He was even pleased to be subjected to her as long as He lived upon earth: "And He was subject unto them." ²

This was not in truth the submission of an inferior toward his superior, for the hypostatic union places Jesus high above all creatures. It was the act of deference of a son toward her,

¹ Ps. XLIV, 10.

² LUKK, II, 51.

whom Divine Providence had singled out to provide for the temporal needs of his life.

For it was to Mary that the noble task of attending to the temporal wants of Jesus was confided: a responsibility which she shared with her chaste Spouse, St. Joseph. Mary and Joseph had to clothe and feed the Infant Word Incarnate; they had to protect the Saviour of the world against the inclemency of the seasons and the hostility of men.

Oh, the humility of the King of kings! Oh, the unspeakable dignity of Mary and Joseph, in whose arms the Creator of the universe could rest happy and secure!

EXAMPLE

THE APPARITION OF OUR BLESSED LADY AT MONTE BERICO

In the beginning of the fifteenth century, the city of Vicenza, in Northern Italy, was visited by a horrible pestilence, which carried off numerous victims. The citizens, in their distress, had recourse to the powerful intercession of Mary. Their confidence was not in vain.

Moved with compassion at the miserable plight of the unhappy people, the Mother of God appeared in a vision to a holy woman named Vincenza, on the seventh of May, 1426, com-

manding her to go to the Bishop and to the Magistrate, to induce them to build a church in her honor, on Monte Berico, which is but a short distance from the city. Meantime the Blessed Virgin assured Vincenza that the awful scourge would immediately cease, if only her wish were complied with.

Vincenza readily obeyed, but her words were not believed. On the second of August, that same year, the most holy Mother of God appeared a second time to the pious woman, in the same place as before. Renewing her former behest, Mary took in her hands an olive branch with which she traced on the ground the design of the church that was to be built there in her honor.

This time the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, on hearing of this second vision, yielded to the entreaties of Vincenza. The people came together at the place appointed and promised to do what Mary had commanded. On the twenty-fifth of the same month, the first stone of the new church was laid, and from that day the plague began to be less severe, until three months after, that is, when the church was completed, the scourge which for twenty years had afflicted the city and the surrounding district disappeared entirely.

Incredible are the many graces which Mary thenceforth bestowed on those who went to visit

her in this privileged church. It was reserved for Cardinal Joseph Sarto, who was soon after to become the Sovereign Pontiff Pius X, to make solemn recognition, in the name of the Church and of all Christian people, of the favors granted by Mary to her faithful subjects. On the twenty-fifth of August in the year of Jubilee, 1900, Cardinal Sarto, in memory of the everlasting gratitude of the people to the most holy Mother of God, and in the name of the Vatican Chapter, crowned the Sacred Image of Mary, venerated in the basilica of Monte Berico, with a golden crown. Thus did the Church seal the bonds of affection and thanksgiving which unite the Christian people to the great Mother of God and men.

PRAYER

O Mary, Mother truly admirable, to whose voice God Himself was made obedient! O glorious Queen of heaven and earth, exercise thy sway over my heart, and ordain that my thoughts and feelings, alas! too often alien from thine own, may become perfectly conformed to the law of thy Divine Son. Amen.

Mother of Good Counsel

GIFT OF COUNSEL IN MARY

"Counsel and equity are mine, prudence is mine, strength is mine." (PROV. VIII, 14.)

GOD, who desires the salvation of man, and who of His infinite goodness, furnishes him with the means necessary for the attainment of his last end, has supplied us, amid the perplexities of life, with a sure means of solving our doubts, by imparting to us the gift of counsel.

By this gift we feel impelled to turn to the Holy Spirit, to obtain from Him light in our anxieties, and a clear knowledge of what it behoves us to do, in order to please God and save our souls. The Holy Spirit, like a tender father, hearkens to the cry of our heart, and in His infinite bounty sends a ray of heavenly light to illumine our soul, to dispel its darkness, to show it the way it should follow, and to fill it with a sense of security and peace. Our soul can then cry out with the Psalmist: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?" ¹

¹ Ps. xxvi, 1-2.

How precious is this gift of counsel! Let us ask it of God with all humility and perseverance.

* * *

Next to Jesus, Mary is that privileged creature which possessed in a superlative degree the gift of counsel.

Her soul was, in fact, at all times turned toward God, to whose inspirations she ever responded with alacrity. In her, far more than in any other saint, the following words find their full and complete application: "Counsel shall keep thee and prudence shall preserve thee."¹ And this promptness with which Mary turned to God in all things and perceived the lights He sent her, preserved her holy soul continually in perfect peace. This peace abode always with her, and imparted to her every action a celestial radiance.

It was, however, in two circumstances of her life especially that Mary gave proof of possessing the supernatural gift of counsel in a superior degree.

The first was at the moment of her presentation in the Temple. She then clearly perceived how pleasing it would be to God if she consecrated herself to Him by a vow of perpetual virginity: nor did she wait till riper years to put this vow into effect, thus showing how her actions were eminently characterized

¹ PROV. II, 11.

by the gift of counsel which animated each of them.

Again, at the moment of the Annunciation this gift shone forth in Mary with an added splendor. Hailed by the Angel as "full of grace" and solicited by him to give her consent to the realization of the Incarnation, the Holy Virgin inquired of the celestial messenger as to the dispositions of the divine will in her regard; which when she knew, she offered herself without reserve as the humble servant of the Lord.

O Woman without peer, grant that, like unto thee, I may frequently have recourse to the lights of the Holy Spirit, that I may know and perform in all things the holy will of God, and that I may therein find perfect peace.

* * *

Just as he who has recourse to wise counsel is in the way of safety,¹ so also he who neglects to seek counsel courts his own ruin. The punishment which God usually inflicts on individuals and peoples who, of set purpose, tread under foot His law and violate His justice, consists in withdrawing from them the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit, and leaving them to their own perverse inclinations: "I let them go according to the desires of their heart."²

¹ PROV. XI, 14.

² PS. LXXX, 18.

The natural consequence of the subtraction of the gift of counsel is a headstrong rashness, to which we see the impious given over: this foolhardiness is commonly the precursor of ruin and death. The carnal man, who desires only the goods of this world and the pleasures of sense, is urged on by a blind instinct to search after enjoyments: sooner or later, however, these very things carry him away like a whirlwind and he miserably perishes.

Beware, O my soul, of despising the lights of the Holy Spirit. Rather have constant recourse to the Author of all good, saying after the Prophet, with faith and humility: "I will hear what the Lord will speak to me: for He will speak peace unto His people."¹

EXAMPLE

BLESSED LOUIS MARY GRIGNION DE MONTFORT

Blessed Louis Mary Grignon de Montfort, so called from the castle in which he was born, manifested from his early youth a great devotion toward the Blessed Virgin. While still a boy, he used to call Mary by the sweet name of Mother and rejoiced to hear people speak of her virtues and her dignity. Moreover, at times he

¹ *Ibid.* LXXXIV, 9.

loved to separate himself from his companions, to recite the Rosary and sing the praises of this glorious Queen; and yet again he would invite others to join him in this pious exercise.

This devotion became more fervent as he grew older, so much so, that as he advanced in years, he also felt growing within him a greater love for the Mother of God and men. When he was ordained priest, he gave himself entirely to the work of saving souls, especially by means of missions, in which he never omitted to invoke the powerful intercession of Mary. This heavenly Queen, like a tender mother, deigned to bless his labors with most abundant fruits, in spite of the fierce persecutions which were raised against him.

To Mary, indeed, he had recourse in all his trials. To her he consecrated all his labors and sufferings. Every day, after his work was over, he prostrated himself before her Altar as if to obtain from her solace and comfort.

So ardent was his desire to enroll the faithful in the service of the Queen of Heaven, that among other endeavors to propagate devotion to her, he thought of establishing everywhere the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary.

Moreover, he founded a Congregation of missionaries of the Society of Mary, who devoted themselves continually to this holy work. It was principally by means of this singular devo-

tion to the Mother of God, that he was successful in converting numerous sinners, in sanctifying many souls and in preserving the Christian people from the heresy of Jansenism, which had crept in everywhere.

The name of Blessed Grignon will remain ever dear to the devout clients of Mary on account of a book full of heavenly wisdom which he wrote on the true devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In this book, the Apostle of the Queen of Heaven teaches the way of consecrating ourselves entirely to her, placing in her hands all we have and all we do, that she may be our Mediatrix with her Son. He died on the twenty-eighth of April, 1716, and Leo XIII beatified him on the twenty-second of January, 1888.

PRAYER

O Mary, it is to the effect of thy gift of counsel that we are indebted for the salvation of the world. Obtain for me, I beseech thee, of the Holy Spirit, that I may receive His lights with deep humility, and follow His counsels with a docile heart, in order that, like thee, I may partake of the promises made to those who have received the spirit of adoption of the sons of God. Amen. ¹

¹ ROM. VIII, 15.

Mother of Our Creator

RELATION OF MARY WITH THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

"I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus, and as a cypress tree on Mount Sion. I was exalted like a palm tree in Cades, and as a rose plant in Jericho."
(ECCLUS., XXIV, 17-18.)

BY THE very fact of becoming Mother of God, Mary entered into relationship, so to speak, with each of the Three Divine Persons. She became so intimately united with the Holy Trinity, that no other creature has ever been admitted to anything like this close communion with the thrice Holy God. A consideration of this relationship will not be without consolation for the human heart, nor devoid of some practical utility.

In the first place, we may say that, by engendering the Word, Mary acquired a certain relationship toward God the Father, in this sense that she conceived in her most chaste womb and brought forth to the light of this world, that same Son, whom God the Father has generated from all eternity of His own substance.

The Son of God is therefore, at one and the

same time, Son of Mary, though under another aspect; and just as He was generated, according to His divine nature, of the substance of the Father, so also, as regards His human nature, He was formed of Mary's own substance.

Nay, more, it is in some sort to Mary that the Father owes His authority over the Son: because as God, both Father and Son are equal, but as Man, the Son is subject to the Father. Consequently, it is due to Mary that the Son of God, being Himself God, could say that He received from the Father the command to die for our sins.¹

I give Thee glory, O Eternal Father, because the execution of the mystery of the Incarnation was committed to Mary, by being made dependent on her consent; for by this Thou didst associate her with the splendors of Thine own eternal fatherhood.

* * *

If the relation of Mary with the Father is so close, what shall we say of that which unites her with the Son? Was it not through Mary that the Word appeared on this earth clothed with our humanity? Was it not of her own most pure substance that the body of the God-Man was formed? If, then, Jesus Christ unites in His Sacred Humanity all created perfec-

¹ JOHN, I, 18.

tions, and can thus offer them in His own Person to His Heavenly Father, it is in some respect to Mary that He owes them, in whose womb He took our humanity.

How sweet, yet potent are the bonds which unite the Son of God to His Blessed Mother! What intimacy in the intercourse between Jesus and Mary! Jesus revealing to Mary all the secrets of His Heart, and Mary modeling her every action on the life of the Saviour.

It is above all in the work of our redemption that the straitness of the ties between the Word and Mary shines forth most vividly. From the conception of the Saviour in her virginal womb to the tragedy of Calvary, Mary fulfilled her office of co-redemptress, offering continually to the Father, her beloved Son as a victim of propitiation on the altar of her heart. After that, it is easy to understand why Christians cannot separate in their worship and in their love the Word Incarnate from her who has the unparalleled honor of being His Mother.

Be Thou ever blessed, Divine Word, for having chosen Mary for Thy Mother. The virgins who follow Thee are all dear to Thy love: but none can be compared to Thine own Immaculate Mother.

* * *

Sweet also and intimate is the relation of Mary with the Third Person of the most Holy Trinity.

Taught by the Angel Gabriel, Mary acquiesces without hesitation in the dispositions of the divine will in her regard, and becomes by the very fact the fruitful Spouse of the Holy Ghost. She belongs to herself no longer, having by her consent consecrated the gift of her own self to her Heavenly Bridegroom.

If Mary never ceased to direct all her thoughts and actions toward the Holy Ghost, He on His part let no moment go by, in which He did not exhibit the signs of His peculiar love toward the Bride of His Heart.

Be thou blessed, O Holy Spirit, God of Love, for Thy sweet communications to Thy chosen Bride, in whom Thou didst find unalloyed delight.

EXAMPLE

ST. PEREGRINE LAZIOSI

St. Peregrine Laziosi was born at Forli, on the first of May, 1265. In his youth he proved a noble and valiant knight, but a fierce enemy of the Church and the Pope. As his townsmen rebelled against the Pope, he became one of the boldest leaders of the revolution. But the

Blessed Virgin to whom, notwithstanding his evil-doing, he had ever preserved a special devotion, watched over him.

It happened that St. Philip Benizi, the fifth General of the Order of the Servants of Mary, came to Forli at the command of the Sovereign Pontiff, to bring back that city to the obedience of the Holy See. But this dutiful son of the Church was cruelly treated by the rebels. Peregrine, more daring than the rest, not only insulted St. Philip, but even went so far as to strike him. But this great Saint meekly bore the injury and, in imitation of St. Stephen the first holy martyr, prayed fervently for his persecutors.

At the sight of so genuine a humility and charity, Peregrine, overcome with grief, ran in search of the Saint whom he had offended and humbly asked his pardon. St. Philip received the lowly penitent and assured him of pardon. He then exhorted him to change his life and to place himself under the protection of the most holy Mother of God, the better to carry out his good resolutions.

Henceforth Peregrine was changed into another man; but as he did not know what state of life he ought to embrace, he prayed fervently to Our Lady that she would herself deign to direct his steps in the way that God willed. The divine Mother heard his entreaties, and one

day, as he was praying before her statue, she said to him: "Go to Siena to my Servants and there thou shalt find the way of salvation." Peregrine obeyed and, going out of the city, he found a young man dressed as a traveler, who offered himself as guide. When they arrived in Siena at the door of the Servite monastery, the young man suddenly disappeared, and Peregrine knew that he was an angel sent to guide him on his way.

The penitent received the Servite habit from the hand of St. Philip himself. Together with this outward habit, he also appeared clothed with the spirit of religious perfection. So great was his penance, that for thirty years he was not seen to sit down. His patience also in bearing infirmities was truly extraordinary, so that never a word of complaint was heard to come from his lips. Finally he died full of merits on the first of May, 1345, at the advanced age of eighty years.

PRAYER

What meed of praise can I render to thee, O Mary, when I contemplate thee so closely united to the Most Holy Trinity? Grant that by my fidelity in corresponding with grace, I may always merit to possess within me the Three Divine Persons, according to the words

of thy Son: "If any man love Me, . . . My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make Our abode with him." ¹
Amen.

¹ JOHN, XIV, 23.

Mother of Our Saviour

MARY THE CO-REDEMPRESS OF THE HUMAN
RACE

"Thou hast not spared thy life, by reason of the distress and tribulation of thy people, but hast prevented our ruin in the presence of our God."

(JUDITH, XIII, 25.)

MAN having fallen from his first dignity by original sin, became the slave of the demon and the prey of death. But God pitied him and decreed, of His infinite goodness, to rescue him from his misery and reëstablish him in the state of grace in which he had been created.

To this end, He sent His only-begotten Son upon the earth, in order that, being made man, He should redeem by His blood the human race from the slavery of sin, and make us the adopted sons of God, and heirs to eternal life. Thus the Angel revealing to Joseph the cause of Mary's pregnancy, commanded him to call the Child which should be born, by the name of Jesus, a name which signifies Saviour, "for," he added, "He shall save His people from their sins."¹ And when Jesus came into the world, the angels

¹ MATT. I, 21.

announced Him as the Saviour of mankind.¹

Jesus, my Saviour and my God, be Thou blessed for having delivered me from death. May Thy Holy Name remain so deeply impressed upon my heart, that it may always be for me a pledge of salvation.

* * *

As God created man without the assistance of any creature whatsoever, so also He alone could save him. He willed, however, that His Immaculate Mother should coöperate with Him in this great enterprise, thus associating her in the work of our redemption in an altogether singular manner.

Jesus redeemed us by offering Himself as a victim of expiation to the Eternal Father. For not only did He pray for our salvation, but furthermore He gave Himself up to suffer all the torments which should be inflicted on Him, by the combined efforts of men and demons. He immolated Himself even to the excess of yielding His life upon the cross.

And how did Mary take part in our redemption? In the first place, by obtaining for us, through her ardent desires and fervent prayers, the accomplishment of the great mystery of the Incarnation; secondly, by consenting to become Mother of the Word, giving to Him that human-

¹ LUKE, II, 11.

ity of ours, by which He was to save us; finally, by offering Jesus to the Eternal Father as a victim of propitiation and suffering together with Him woes without measure to satisfy the punishment due for our sins.

Such being the case, it is the duty of every Christian to compassionate the dolours which Mary, in coöperating with Jesus in the work of our redemption, did suffer for love of us: "Forget not the groanings of thy mother."¹ Not charity alone, but justice also prompts us to share in the sorrows of the Mother of God, for it was for us solely that she suffered.

Happy he, whose devotion impels him, not only to pay homage to Mary's greatness, but also to nourish a tender compassion for her sorrows: he can but partake in the priceless boon of the Redemption.

"May we obtain, O Virgin Mary, salvation through the wounds of Jesus Christ!"²

* * *

Since Mary did coöperate with Jesus in the work of our salvation, it is our bounden duty to render to her our most heartfelt thanks.

The virtuous Esther exposed herself to the danger of death to rescue the people of Israel: the chaste Judith braved the army of Holofernes to deliver the city of Bethulia: Mary of-

¹ EECCLUS. VII, 29.

² Office of the Seven Dolours.

ferred herself with Jesus, a victim of expiation, not for one town or for one nation alone, but for the whole world.

Let us not, then, forget in our acts of homage, in our affection, in our thanksgivings, to join in one our most holy Redeemer and his Mother, for it is to Mary, after Jesus, that we owe our salvation. In the passion of Jesus and the sorrows of Mary God has placed all our hope of salvation.

It is just, therefore, that we proclaim Mary co-Redemptress of the human race, and honor her as such. This is the most beautiful title that we can give her, because it sums up all the benefits we owe her as our Mother. It is the end of her singular predestination, the principal motive of her Immaculate Conception, the source of her incomparable glory.

EXAMPLE

ST. ALPHONSUS MARY DE LIGUORI

St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori deserves to be mentioned as one of the most devout servants of our Lady. While still a young man, he was accustomed to fast every Saturday in her honor, and he did not allow any one day to pass without visiting her shrine and honoring her with special reverence and love. Being inspired to

leave the world in order to dedicate himself entirely to the service of God, he wished to confirm his holy purpose by hanging up his sword at the altar of Our Lady of Mercy, in this way avowing that he was determined to dedicate his whole life to the service of this glorious Queen of heaven and earth.

Hardly had he embraced the ecclesiastical state when he began to propagate devotion to Our Lady, honoring her with endless fervent practices, and speaking of her to all who came his way. He loved to preach to the people on the glories of Mary and on her excellent virtues and powers, which office he performed with such zeal and perfection that often a marvelous light shone on his face and he appeared as if enraptured. Especially did he cherish a tender devotion toward the sorrows of the great Mother of God. He compassionated with lively affection the bitter sufferings which she endured in the passion of Jesus, striving to make others join in this spirit of filial compassion toward her who is truly called the co-Redemptress of the human race.

In his preaching, Alphonsus never failed to impress upon the faithful the powerful patronage of Mary, her beneficence in welcoming sinners and her motherly assistance especially in the hour of death. And this he performed with such advantage to souls, that often he was suc-

cessful in converting sinners steeped in vice. In order that his teaching might come to the notice of a greater number of the faithful, he wrote several pious works in which he exalted the glories of this heavenly Mother and impressed upon all Christians the efficacy of devotion to her. Moreover, he introduced the pious custom of preaching, in the course of a mission, on the power and mercy of Mary, and this always produced a powerful effect upon the people.

After a long life spent entirely in promoting the good of souls, St. Alphonsus breathed forth his spirit to God in his ninetieth year, on the first of August, 1787.

PRAYER

O Mary, inseparable companion of Jesus in the work of our redemption, interpose, I pray thee, thy powerful mediation with thy Son, that the immense sufferings which He endured for me may not be wasted: but that I may find in His sacred wounds all my consolation in this life, and eternal salvation in the hour of my death. Amen.



Virgin Most Prudent

THE VIRTUE OF PRUDENCE IN MARY

"Virgin most prudent, whither goest thou, bright as the dawn of day? Daughter of Sion, thou art wholly fair and sweet, beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun."

(Antiphon of the Magnificat on the Feast of our Lady's Assumption.)

THE end for which man was created, is eternal happiness in the vision of God face to face. This end man must achieve by his own merits; consequently, he must so regulate his actions, that they may be always directed toward this object. It is therefore evident that prudence, which consists precisely in this guiding of our actions and directing them toward our last end, is of primary necessity for us.

If, generally speaking, it is difficult to succeed well in the enterprises of life, it is particularly so when we come to treat of that affair for which we are placed in this world, and which is the one thing necessary.¹ It is of little account to have won honors and riches, and to have

¹ LUKE, x, 42.

enjoyed all possible pleasures, if finally we fail in attaining eternal bliss.

Now it is precisely prudence which guards us against so great an evil. This virtue recalls to our minds the lessons of Jesus Christ and His apostles, and makes us follow with docility the advice of our directors. It makes us circumspect in the difficulties which we encounter: it helps us to foresee the impending dangers in which our virtue might be overthrown; in a word, it holds always present before our eyes the end for which we were created.

Lord, "make me know my end . . . that I may know what is wanting to me." ¹

* * *

Among the virtues which shone with greater splendor in the life of Mary, we must make mention of prudence.

It was prudence which restrained the glorious Virgin from ever proceeding with precipitancy; it was this same virtue which prompted her always to take counsel of her Heavenly Spouse in all the circumstances of her life, to weigh with a wise deliberation the motives of her every action, to decide with calmness the course to be pursued and to follow in all her actions the light of reason and faith.

¹ Ps. XXXVIII, 5.

With what sedulous care did Mary seek to know, at the moment of the Annunciation, the disposition of the divine will in her regard! How docile she was in always following the inspirations from on High!

Also, when she found in the Temple her well-beloved Son, with what humility mingled with maternal tenderness, she asked of Jesus the cause of His absence; and when she had received His answer, how she pondered and mused upon the mysterious reply, "preserving all these words in her Heart!"¹

It was prudence also which dictated to Mary to appear so thoughtful for others during the wedding feast at the nuptials of Cana, and when she heard from Jesus that His hour was not yet come, this same virtue inspired her to give to the waiters the sage counsel: "Whatsoever He shall say to you do ye."²

Take this counsel of Mary's, O my soul, for thy rule of conduct. It is this counsel inspired by prudence, which alone can bring thee to the possession of eternal life.

* * *

Just as there is spiritual prudence, so also there is carnal prudence. The former leads to life, the latter to death: "The wisdom of the flesh is death," says St. Paul.³ Heavenly pru-

¹ LUKE, II, 51.

² JOHN, II, 5.

³ ROM. VIII, 6.

dence reflects upon all the other moral virtues a pure light, guiding, inspiring and facilitating their acts. Fleshly prudence, on the other hand, is accompanied by numberless vices, which debase the soul, and prepare it for eternal ruin.

The first offshoot of carnal prudence is craftiness, which goes along the ways of lying and deceit. Craftiness entails dissimulation and fraud, by means of which the wicked pursue their detestable ends; in reality they are but digging a pit for themselves to fall into.

Oh, how estimable is that prudence which is frank with the frankness of the children of God! It unites the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove; like a trusty bark it carries the mariner in safety through every rock and quicksand, to the harbor of everlasting rest.

EXAMPLE

ST. JOHN DAMASCENE

While God, in His inscrutable judgment, permits that there should arise, in the course of centuries, errors and persecutions against the Church, He does not omit to send men, illustrious for their virtues and sanctity, to defend this His beloved Spouse, and to vindicate the

sacred deposit of revealed truth, even at the cost of their blood.

There arose, in the eighth century, a sect of heretics, who, both by words and deed, opposed with fanatical hatred the worship of sacred images, declaring that these are only idolatry and superstition. Consequently they barbarously destroyed any statues or holy pictures they could find, for which reason they were called "Iconoclasts," which means "breakers of images."

Under such difficult conditions, God deigned to raise up a number of wise and holy men full of faith and courage, who opposed these nefarious profanations and vindicated the truth and legitimacy of the worship paid to sacred images. Among these must be mentioned St. John Damascene, so called from Damascus, a town in Syria, his birthplace. This holy man, both by preaching and writing fearlessly defended the Catholic teaching regarding the worship due to the images of Christ and of the saints. He proved how this worship is not contrary to Sacred Scripture or Tradition.

But his ardor aroused the implacable hatred of the Emperor, Leo the Isaurian, who commanded the Prefect of Damascus to cut off John's right hand, the guilty instrument, as it seemed to the Emperor, of his defending an idolatrous and superstitious cult.

The Saint bore this cruel trial with heroic courage, thinking himself happy to suffer something for the honor of Jesus and Mary. Then he recommended himself with great fervor to the Blessed Virgin, his Mother and Patroness, whose honor in the veneration of sacred images he had defended with such warmth and vigor. This benignant Queen heard his prayers and lo! she caused the hand that had been separated from the arm to be reunited to it in so marvelous a manner, that it seemed as if it had really never been cut off. Thus does Mary beneficently repay those who are zealous for her honor, and who place all their trust in her protection.

St. John Damascene died full of merit, in the year 956, and is honored as a Doctor of the Church.

PRAYER

O Mary, most prudent Virgin, thy life was always so well ordered, that in all thine actions thou never didst seek but the good pleasure of God. Obtain for us, of thy Son, this spirit of counsel and heavenly prudence, in order that seeking nothing but the fulfillment of the divine will, we may happily attain to the possession of our last end. Amen.

Virgin Most Venerable

MARY QUEEN AND MISTRESS OF THE
UNIVERSE

"By me kings reign, and lawgivers decree just things; by me princes rule, and the mighty decree justice."
(PROV. VIII, 15, 16.)

MARY, being the true Mother of Jesus, King and Lord of the whole universe, by this very fact is Queen and Mistress, not only of men, but also of angels. She possesses, then, with Jesus, right of property over all creatures, even those endowed with intelligence, so that she can dispose of them according to her good pleasure. We can even say with all truth that God, in creating the world, had especially in mind these two persons, whom He loved more than all men and angels together. Yes, it was for Jesus and Mary that God formed all this vast universe and adorned it in its different parts.

Rejoice, O my soul, to see thy sovereign Queen holding in her hands the sceptre of the world. Admire this peerless woman, raised to so lofty a dignity, and none the less animated toward us with the tenderest sentiments of mercy and pity. Mary's mercy is for us poor

sinners, an inexhaustible source of hope, a pledge of everlasting life. "Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail! our life, our sweetness, and our hope, hail!"

* * *

The dignity of Mother of God to which Mary was elevated, and the office of Mother of men, which Jesus Christ confided to her, afford so many motives for us to honor the Holy Virgin with an especial cultus.

In the first place, the excellence of the Divine Maternity is so great, that it gives Mary a right to a cultus inferior, it is true, to the cultus due the Divinity, but for all that superior to the cultus we owe to the saints. This is called by a special name, cultus of hyperdulia, and consists in honoring the Holy Virgin as Mother of the Incarnate Word, true God and true Man and supreme Lord of the universe.

Moreover, we owe to Mary a cultus of dulia, on account of the marvelous graces with which she is adorned, and the heroic virtues which she practiced during her mortal life. In thus honoring Mary, we acknowledge her as our Queen, and proclaim ourselves her devoted servants.

But it is not only in private that we should honor Mary; we owe her also a public cultus. For in the same way that individuals, taken apart, owe to the Mother of God the saving graces which Jesus Christ has won for each of

them, in like manner the entire human race has received through Mary its patent of nobility: "Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people, for thou hast done manfully." ¹

* * *

The cultus which Christians render to Mary is no barren homage; it is a source of unnumbered blessings for individuals as well as for society.

This cultus is, in the first place, a most efficacious means for coming to Jesus; for the knowledge and love of Mary, by a natural consequence, draws the soul onward to a knowledge and love of our Divine Saviour, of whom the Holy Virgin is the most perfect copy that ever existed.

Furthermore, the honor which we pay to Mary inevitably redounds to the honor of Jesus, and becomes to Him a source of glory and praise, for it is written that parents are the glory of their children: *Gloria filiorum patres eorum.* ²

Moreover, a firm faith in Mary's privileges is a token of right belief in the Incarnation and the other mysteries of our religion. Wherefore, the Church proclaims that Mary, by herself alone, has destroyed all heresies in the whole

¹ JUDITH, XV, 10, 11.

² PROV. XVII, 6.

world: '*Gaude Maria Virgo, cunctas hæreses sola interemisti in universo mundo.*'¹

Finally, the cultus which we pay to Mary is an unfailing fountain of blessings, whether in the spiritual or temporal order, for this mighty Queen never abandons her servants, but continually helps them during life, and delights to assist them in the hour of their death. She answers love by love: *Ego diligentes me diligo.*²

EXAMPLE

VENERABLE JULIUS ARRIGHETTI

Venerable Julius Arrighetti was born at St. Peter of Sieve, near Florence, on the sixteenth of March, 1622. His great devotion for the Queen of Heaven moved him, while still a youth, to enter the Order of her Servants.

Having entered upon his novitiate, he soon distinguished himself among his brethren for a rare love toward the Mother of God. Later, he was elected Prior of the monastery of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence, in which there were living at that time over a hundred Religious. His first thought was to decline to accept such an important office, but afterwards, considering it to be the will of God he humbly submitted to the disposition of his Superiors.

¹ 1st. Antiphon of the Third Nocturn of the Office of Our Lady.

² PROV. VIII, 17.

His first thought, on this occasion, was to have recourse to his heavenly Patroness and implore her aid. One night, after all the Religious had retired to their cells, he took the keys of the monastery and carrying them into the Church, placed them on the altar of the Santissima Annunziata, and lying prostrate on the ground he exclaimed: "Most Holy Virgin, most loving Patroness, well do you know the needs of this your religious family. You see also how weak I am. You must yourself be the Superior, you the Mother, to govern this your family, and I will be your minister and your representative."

After this, it seemed to Julius, as he revealed later to some of his Religious, that he was being lifted up as it were by the arm from the ground, and he heard a voice saying to him: "Be confident and persevere in your work." He arose full of vigor and henceforth began to rule and govern the numerous family intrusted to him with such prudence, that some time after he was elected Superior of the whole Province.

After three years spent in this office, moved as he was by his love of solitude, he resigned the dignity of Provincial and betook himself to the hermitage of Monte Senario, in order there to lead a penitential life among the Servite hermits who lived then on that holy mountain in a great spirit of prayer and mortification.

Soon afterward, Julius was summoned by a

Brief of Innocent XI to take up the government of the whole Order, in which office one of his principal cares was to promote devotion to our blessed Lady. When the term of his office had expired, the same Pontiff confirmed him therein, and the Venerable Julius Arrighetti thus continued to govern the Order of the Servants of Mary with the special assistance of Our Lady, until in the General Chapter of 1690, he asked to be relieved of this office.

The Capitular Fathers were overcome with grief, for they knew that they were losing in him not only a zealous Superior but also an affectionate father and vigilant pastor. Julius died in the odor of sanctity, on the tenth of October, 1705, leaving behind him a noteworthy example of what every true Servant of Mary ought to be.

PRAYER

O Mary, I acknowledge and proclaim thee Queen of the whole universe, and I choose thee this day for my own Queen and Mother. O Mother of the Incarnate Word, deign now to accept me as thy servant: I am thine and I wish to be thine for ever: *Ego servus tuus et filius ancillæ tuæ.*¹ Amen.

¹ Ps. cxy, 16.

Virgin Most Renowned

THE ANNUNCIATION OF MARY

"Hail! full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women." (LUKE I, 28.)

ABSORBED in profound contemplation, the humble Virgin of Nazareth, Spouse of Joseph the carpenter, was pondering the ills which afflict humanity, at the same time fostering in her heart the most ardent longing for the advent of the Messias promised by the prophets. Suddenly a heavenly messenger presents himself to her. It is the Archangel Gabriel who, bowing with reverence before her, says: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." Many holy persons had, ere this, been saluted with the words contained in the latter half of this sentence: but no one before had heard himself styled "full of grace." Wherefore, the Holy Virgin, in her humility, queries within herself what so extraordinary a salutation may mean. The Angel, in answer to her half-expressed thought, goes on to disclose to her the divine mystery: "Thou hast found grace with God." ¹ And because Mary is full of grace, therefore is she destined to be the

¹ Ps. I, 30.

Mother of the Incarnate Word: "Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a Son." ¹

The prophets had foretold the coming of the Messiah, as of Him who would refresh the earth, parched by sin, with the dew of divine grace. The patriarchs had desired Him, as the dispenser of life-giving grace. Mary herself, in her ecstasies, had foreseen Him, as crowning His elect with grace. It was fitting then, that the King of divine grace, should have for His Mother a Virgin in whom grace should reside in its plenitude.

* * *

But the Incarnation of the Word was a mystic alliance between God and the human nature. It was not sufficient, in order to bring it about, that the Creator should will to unite Himself to His creature: this work could not be perfect, unless man himself freely consented to this union. For this end the Archangel Gabriel was sent to Mary: his mission being to disclose to the Holy Virgin, the heavenly mystery, and to receive from her, in the name of the human race, her acquiescence in the designs of the Most High.

But Mary's will was in entire conformity with the will of God: how then, could she refuse the demand of the Angel? The humble Virgin

¹ *Ibid.* 31.

has not a moment of doubt or hesitation as to her choice. She only inquires, with holy prudence, as to the manner of the mystery's accomplishment. And hardly has she understood the divine will, than she pronounces, with ineffable love and full-submission, those sublime words, which will excite the admiration of the whole world to the end of time: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word,"—*fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*.¹

In the beginning, the *fiat* of the Almighty had called into existence from nothingness this vast universe. Now, unutterable prodigy! Mary's acquiescence to the divine will is the starting point of a marvel without precedent: God, without ceasing to be what He is, will take our nature and become true man, as He is eternally true God.



The human mind will never perfectly understand how much the Incarnation, accomplished in Mary at that moment when she uttered the epoch-making *fiat*, has ennobled her and rendered her blessed.

Yet, who would think it? At the moment when she was raised high above all angels and men, she abased herself as much as is possible to a creature. Her greatness was equalled only

¹ LUKE, I, 38.

by her humility. Holy humility, how pleasing thou art to the King of glory, since His preference is for those who possess thee!

Christian soul, cultivate, after the example of the Mother of God, the fair flower of humility. It is only by this means that thou canst call down upon thyself the divine blessings.

As the fall of the angels, like that of man, had for its origin rebellion against the law of God, so it is pride which puts the finish on the eternal damnation of the reprobate. On the other hand, it is in the sincere imitation of the humility of Jesus and Mary, that both the basis and apex of our salvation are to be found.

EXAMPLE

ST. PHILIP BENIZI

It is the will of God that the Blessed Virgin should be loved, honored and venerated the whole world over, as the true Sovereign and Mistress of heaven and earth. Of all the saints who have largely contributed toward propagating this devotion to the Mother of God and in bringing the Christian people to realize the advantages which all may derive from this excellent practice, St. Philip Benizi, fifth General of the Order of Servants of Mary, holds a prominent place.

He was born on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, by whom, when a youth, he was called to join the Order which she had recently founded in a most marvelous manner at Monte Senario. Having been elected Superior of his Order, he devoted himself entirely to promoting the glory of the blessed Mother of God, drawing as many people as he could to submit themselves lovingly to her.

Obeying the command of his heavenly Queen, he went forth from Italy into France, Germany and Poland, preaching everywhere the glories of Mary and founding monasteries, from which the devotion to the great Mother of God could be spread among all the faithful.

Numerous wonders confirmed his preaching. Many times being lost in thick forests, he was led by an angel on to the right path. He converted many notorious sinners, and saw the good effect of his preaching on his hearers. Many young men of noble families knelt at his feet, begging for the habit of the Servants of Mary.

Desirous of propagating the kingdom of Christ, St. Philip sent many bands of Religious among the barbarians in order to bring the welcome tidings of salvation to people who were wholly submerged in darkness and in the shadow of death. Many of these missionaries fell victims to the sword of persecution, while invoking the holy names of Jesus and Mary.

Right up to the end of his life, St. Philip Benizi did not cease preaching the glories of Mary. Death overtook him while on a journey undertaken for the honor of his heavenly Queen. During the visitation of the monasteries of his Order, in which he encouraged the faithful in their devotion to the most holy Mother of God, he breathed forth his soul, holding in his hand the image of his Crucified Lord, which he was wont to call his most cherished book. This took place on the twenty-second of August, 1285, being the octave day of the Assumption of Our Lady.

PRAYER

O glorious Virgin, who hast merited by thy humility to be filled with grace and to become Mother of the Author of all good, obtain for me, I pray thee, of thy Son, that I may never by my pride, put any obstacle to the work of grace in my soul. Amen.

Virgin Most Powerful

VIRTUE OF FORTITUDE IN MARY

"Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her. The heart of her husband trusteth in her."

(PROV. XXXI, 10, 11.)

WHITHERSOEVER we turn our gaze, we behold around us dangers, difficulties, and calamities of all kinds. The virtue of fortitude is therefore of supreme necessity for the Christian. By strengthening the soul, this cardinal virtue puts it in the way of avoiding dangers, surmounting difficulties, and conquering or, at least, bearing patiently the ills of life.

The supernatural virtue of fortitude helps us, on the one hand, to get the better of that childish fear which habitually oppresses us at the sight of the evils wherewith we are threatened; on the other hand, it tones down and corrects that arrogant self-conceit which, under a show of valor, is in reality, but weakness and cowardice.

It was owing to the virtue of fortitude that the apostles were able to go forth from the presence of the Council, "rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the

name of Jesus.”¹ It is thanks to this same virtue that Confessors fought courageously the good fight and that Virgins triumphed over the frailty of their sex, scoring a complete victory against the flesh, the world and the devil. It was through this virtue that the Martyrs had the courage to despise death rather than deny their Faith.

Oh, how valuable is the virtue of fortitude, and of how great necessity to the Christian, who would fight the good fight of the Lord!

* * *

If we wish to know the eminent degree in which Mary possessed the virtue of fortitude, it will suffice us to recall her unshaken patience in bearing the evils of this life. Recrimination or murmur never proceeded from her mouth. Those words which she addressed to Jesus when she found Him again at Jerusalem: “Son, why hast Thou done so to us?” were not the complaint of an impatient soul, but a respectful expression of profound sorrow.

It was especially at the foot of the cross that Mary’s fortitude was seen in striking relief. Urged on by the immense love which burned in her heart, the Immaculate Virgin was enabled to assist at the consummation of the awful Sacri-

¹ Acts, v, 41.

fice, and to remain to the end a witness to the mystery of our Redemption.

In truth, no one better than the Holy Virgin could render testimony both to the divinity and humanity of Jesus, as He hung upon the cross, dying for the world's salvation. Was she not the true Mother of the Saviour? Had not the mystery of the Incarnation been accomplished in her chaste womb? Mary, therefore, did not hesitate to expose herself to peril of death, in order to confess Jesus Christ. For we may be sure that it was no wish of the deicide Jews to spare the Mother of their Victim: if danger was averted, it was by the omnipotence of the God-Man, who would not permit that any of His relatives or friends should then undergo a violent death on His account. Had it not been so, we may well believe that Mary would have been the first to be put to death in hatred of Christ. Is it not just, then, that we should proclaim her the most valiant of women?

* * *

Since Mary did not shed her blood for the Faith, we cannot call her a Martyr in the strict sense of the word. None the less this title, if taken in a spiritual and mystical sense, belongs eminently to her, by reason of the excellence of the virtue of fortitude which urged her on to suffer, of the ardent charity wherewith she

accepted suffering, and of the splendor of her testimony to the faith of Christ. We may, then, salute her in the Church's words: "Hail, O noble-minded Princess: thou art the first rose in the garden of martyrs: to thee belongs the lily of virginity."¹

Endeavor, O my soul, to imitate an example so noble and generous, in bearing with patience the evils, the woes and the persecutions of this present life. Be mindful to confess Jesus even at pain of death, that He in return may bear thee favorable witness before His Heavenly Father: "Every one that shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven."²

EXAMPLE

ST. JOAN OF ARC

St. Joan of Arc was born in the village of Domremy in Lorraine. From her parents, who were good and honest peasants, she inherited not material riches, but a tender devotion and sincere faith, to which were united a lively trust in the patronage of Mary. She passed her early years in a life of simple retirement, occupying her time in tending the sheep and in prayer.

¹ 8th Resp. in the Office of the Seven Dolors of Mary.

² MATT. X, 32.

She found all her delights at the altar of Our Lady.

At the same time this powerful Queen of Heaven was preparing this second Judith to fight under her protection the battles of her Lord. By many visions God commanded her to go to the aid of the King of France, who was reduced to the last extremity, in order to raise up from the depth of its ruin the Kingdom of France, which was known as the Kingdom of Mary. "*Regnum Gallie regnum Mariæ.*"

Joan generously obeyed the divine command, although the hardships of leaving home and leading a military life were very great indeed. Before setting out, she prostrated herself before the statue of Our Lady at Vaucouleurs. When the King set her at the head of the army, she caused three banners to be made: the first, which was carried before the troops, bore the words "Jesus, Mary"; on the second was depicted the Crucifixion with Mary at the foot of the cross; the third, which she bore in her hand, represented the Annunciation of Our Lady.

Admirable was the courage she displayed in the heart of the conflict, reassuring the soldiers that success would be theirs in the end. Before every engagement she would order them to gather together under the banner of Mary, to sing her praises and invoke her help.

After having saved France and restored the

King to his throne, Joan was abandoned by the very people for whom she had done so much and given over into the hands of her enemies who, out of extreme hatred, condemned her to be burnt at the stake as a heretic and apostate. But the saintly heroine gave abundant testimony of her faith, protesting that she had only been obedient to the command of God. When she arrived at the place of execution she wished that a cross should be held before her eyes, to strengthen her at the hour of death. When the flames were gathering round her, she pronounced the most holy name of Jesus and then bowing her head, she finished her usual ejaculation, by reciting in heaven that other name so dear to her, the name of Mary.

PRAYER

Most Holy Virgin Mary, O thou the most valiant of women, who with such constancy and generosity didst confess Jesus Christ at the foot of the cross, sustain me in the trials of life, and do not permit that I should ever be ashamed of the Christian name, but grant that I may show myself worthy of it to the day of my death. Amen.

Virgin Most Merciful

THE MERCY OF MARY

“Put thy feet into her fetters, and thy neck into her chains . . . Then shall her fetters be a strong defense for thee, and a firm foundation, and her chain a robe of glory.”

(ECCLUS., VI, 25, 30.)

WHEN we reflect on the multitude of trials and miseries incident to man during this life, we cannot refrain from a feeling of deepest sadness. Our first parents having lost, by original sin, the grace of God, and with it that state of justice in which they had been created, fell into a state of misery, in which manifold ills became their portion. These evils, which were to extend to their posterity, originate in four deep wounds inflicted on our nature by original sin. These are, in the understanding, darkness as to the truths of faith; in the will, a perverse inclination; in our lower faculties, an inordinate proneness toward the pleasures of sense, and an extreme difficulty in resisting evil.

Moreover, man, who would have been impassible and immortal had he remained faithful to God, lost by his first sin all these privileges,

and consequently became subject to misery, disease and death.

Oh, how deep is the stain of sin, and how pitiable is the lot of man, thus deprived of original righteousness! Let us give thanks to God, who being "rich in mercy," ¹ has had compassion upon us. Not merely content to succor us Himself, He has given us in Mary a Mother sensible of our unhappy state, and all solicitous to relieve us: *Solve Regina, Mater Misericordiæ.*"

* * *

We are indebted to God's infinite bounty for having given us, in Jesus and Mary, two persons animated with the tenderest sentiments of mercy and compassion. St. Paul says of Jesus Christ that He willed to be like unto us, and that like us He chose to know sorrow, in order that we might find in Him a Father "full of mercy." ²

Mary, too, had to suffer bitter torments, especially at the foot of her Son's cross, in order that she might become the tender, clement and loving Mother of mankind. And so, like Jesus, she is full of the most compassionate mercy toward us, poor sinners. This mercy makes her prompt to succor our miseries. Like a powerful advocate, she never ceases to intercede for us, in order that God may give us

¹ EPH. II, 4.

² HEB. II, 17.

the light needful to guide our steps, inspire us with a right intention in all our actions, hinder our will from declining toward evil, strengthen us against the assaults of the enemy, and ever preserve in our souls that heavenly grace which allays in us the fever of concupiscence.

Mary's bountiful mercy does not extend merely to our spiritual wants: it embraces also our bodily needs. This tender Mother has known poverty, fatigue and hunger. No wonder, then, if she is intent on relieving us even in our temporal miseries. She delights in sending to our assistance the holy angels, whose Queen she is and over whom she commands. She even sometimes deigns to appear in person to her devoted servants, especially at the hour of death, in order to comfort them in that dread and decisive moment.

* * *

In imitation of Jesus and Mary, a Christian should exercise, toward his neighbor, spiritual and corporal works of mercy, endeavoring to relieve, as far as possible, his miseries and wants. Since, however, the greatest evil which man may encounter is to fall into sin, the sole obstacle to divine mercy, therefore the most excellent of all works is to prevent men from offending God. "My brethren, if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him, he must

know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins.”¹

Not only should we endeavor to withhold our neighbor from mortal sin, but we should strive also to inspire him with a holy hatred for venial sin. It is true that venial sin does not deprive the soul of charity; yet it lessens the fervor thereof, and introduces us in a way which, in the long run, might lead us to eternal death.

To occupy oneself in so holy a work as the conversion of sinners, is an earnest of countless blessings: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”²

EXAMPLE

ST. JEROME EMILIANI

St. Jerome Emiliani, Founder of the Congregation of Somasca, experienced in a marvelous way the great mercy of our blessed Lady. He was a noble patrician of Venice, and had first served as a soldier, during which time he had unhappily allowed himself to fall into every sort of vice.

It happened that he was once entrusted with the defense of the fortress of Castelnuovo, in

¹ JAMES, v, 19, 20.

² MATT. v, 7.

Friuli. When this was stormed by the enemy, Jerome was captured and confined in a dark prison, where he was loaded with chains.

Not knowing what would happen to him, he began to be filled with remorse for his past life, almost to the point of despair, when the thought of Mary the Mother of God and men enlightened him. He remembered that this most powerful Mother was invoked as "Virgin most merciful" and as "Mother of divine mercy." To her, therefore, from the depths of his prison he confidently turned, promising to lead a better life in the future. He also made a vow to go, clothed as he was, to give thanks before Mary's shrine in Treviso, if this loving Mother should deliver him from his miserable condition. And lo! in an instant, Jerome beheld his prison filled with light, and the Virgin Mary descending from heaven to loose with her own hands the chains with which he was bound. Moreover, the Mother of God handed him a key with which to open the door of the prison and escape.

Being now freed in this marvelous way, Jerome directed his steps toward Treviso, bearing his chains on his shoulders in token of his wonderful deliverance. But as the roads were occupied by the enemy, he was in danger of falling into their hands. He had again recourse to Mary and this heavenly Queen instantly appeared to him, and caused him to pass unnoticed

through the camp of the enemy on his twenty-mile journey. When he arrived at Treviso, he went and prostrated himself before the image of Our Lady, and wishing to fulfil his vow, he laid on her altar the instruments of his torture.

From that hour he placed himself under Mary's special protection and, in memory of the kindness shown him, began to recite her Office daily. Moreover, when he set on foot his memorable work of educating orphans, he exhorted not only these but all with whom he came in contact, to reverence this powerful Queen, by often reciting the "Hail Holy Queen" and other sacred hymns. He died a holy death on the eighth of February, 1537.

PRAYER

O Mary, thou art twice Mother of Mercy, because thou hast been made Mother of our most merciful Saviour, and furthermore because thou hast given to us so many signs of thy maternal care and love. Turn upon us, we beseech thee, thy glance of compassion, and grant that we may always live free from sin, which is the only impediment to receiving the fruits of the divine mercies. Amen.

Virgin Most Faithful

MARY, THE FAITHFUL SPOUSE OF ST. JOSEPH

"Happy is the husband of a good wife . . . A good wife is a good portion, and she shall be given in the portion of them that fear God, to a man for his good works."

(ECCLUS., XXXVI, 1, 3.)

THE providence of God which governs all things with power and wisdom, was pleased to grant to Mary, as an inseparable companion during a great portion of her mortal life and of the mortal life of Jesus, St. Joseph, the man truly "just,"¹ who, like the Blessed Virgin, was descended from the royal stock of David. Mary and Joseph were then united by the bonds of a true marriage, and the holy Patriarch, by this intimate union, entered into community of goods with the Blessed Virgin. Thenceforth he fulfilled in the Holy Family the office of father and head, while Jesus and Mary were in some sort subject to him.

Oh, with what fidelity did St. Joseph guard these holy treasures which had been entrusted to him! Indeed, in the worthy fulfillment of his

¹ MATT. I, 19.

office, he had to face a thousand dangers and brave unnumbered persecutions; but the love he bore toward Jesus and Mary made him suffer all with joy.

During those years of closest union with Jesus, his Foster-Son, and Mary, his chaste Spouse, what treasures of grace did he not receive? Truly, the life of St. Joseph, in such a school was like "the path of the just which, as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day."¹

* * *

In her relations with her chaste Spouse, Mary set herself to practice the virtues becoming a faithful wife. She loved St. Joseph as the inseparable companion of her life; she revered him as the guardian of her virginity; she vowed to him a perfect faithfulness.

This unbounded fidelity never failed. Even when the most anguishing doubt tormented his soul, St. Joseph preserved toward Mary all his affection, reverence and respect, committing himself unreservedly to the Divine Goodness, and firmly trusting that God would shortly put in evidence the honor of his Spouse, by dissipating in one way or another the doubts which troubled him.

What a spectacle worthy of the gaze of the

¹ PROV. IV, 18.

Heavenly Court was this Holy Family! The King of kings and Master of the universe, who made Himself a little child, lavished profusely upon the souls of Mary and Joseph the treasures of divine grace; and these two holy consorts admired with deepest veneration, the humility and goodness of God who had deigned to become their Son! And since only a man adorned with the most perfect purity could be the worthy guardian of such matchless holiness as dwelt in Jesus and Mary, St. Joseph was privileged, as we may firmly believe, never to have committed one single venial sin. How can we find words to express the eminent degree of charity and holiness to which God had been pleased to raise the foster-father of His Son?

* * *

The unexampled office with which St. Joseph was invested, and the eminent degree of sanctity which he acquired in the company of Jesus and Mary, fully justify the glorious title which Pius IX solemnly decreed to him, of Protector of the Universal Church.

From his celestial throne on high, St. Joseph watches over all the faithful ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ. His patronage extends to all the needs of this life, and no one has ever called on him in vain, for it is impossible that God, who was subject to him upon earth,

should refuse anything to his intercession. Here, then, is the reason why souls truly enamored of divine charity feel themselves so strongly drawn to place all their interest in his hands, and never to disjoin him from the Saviour and His Mother in their devotion. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are the inseparable objects of the love, esteem and devotion of the predestined.

Let us thank God for having given us, in St. Joseph, so powerful a protector. In all our sufferings and sorrows, let us have recourse to this glorious Patriarch, and beg of him in particular to obtain for us the grace of a happy and holy death.

Blessed the Christian, who has the good fortune to die in the company of Jesus, Mary and Joseph! The assistance of this earthly trinity, in the last moments of life, is for him an assured pledge of possessing hereafter the uncreated Trinity which is man's last end.

EXAMPLE

ST. JOSEPH, VIRGINAL SPOUSE OF OUR LADY

St. Joseph, predestined to be the Spouse of the holiest of all creatures and the guardian of the Son of God made Man, was filled by God from his youth with special graces and spiritual gifts, so that he became a model for all the de-

vout servants of our heavenly Queen. Especially is he worthy of being proposed as a perfect example of a faithful spouse and a kind father. To him God entrusted the important and honorable office of guarding the virginity of His Son's Mother and of protecting the Incarnate Word in His early years.

On account of this great dignity, St. Joseph came nearer than any other saint to Jesus and Mary. He must therefore have been more united to them in affection and love, so that we may say that even as he reproduced the virtues of Mary, so he was a spotless mirror, in which was reflected the incomparable sanctity of the Son of God.

The particular merit by which St. Joseph is honored in the Gospel is his justice. "*Joseph autem cum esset justus*": by which words is implied the fulness of all virtues and in a special manner his fidelity as the Spouse of our blessed Lady.

The lily sprung from the rod, with which St. Joseph is wont to be represented, portrays for us not only his perpetual virginity but also the first of the bitter sorrows which afflicted his soul. While yet ignorant of the great mystery which was brought to pass in Our Lady, by the power of the Holy Ghost, he reluctantly decided to put her away privately, for fear on the one hand of breaking the law, which forbade any-

one to keep an unfaithful spouse, and on the other of exposing to infamy his chosen one, whom he beheld to be filled with the highest virtues, and of whom he could not conceive the least suspicion.

This indeed was the hardest trial to which the holy Patriarch was subjected, but in this trial he did not allow himself to be discouraged, being sure that God would help him. And this came to pass when the Angel appeared to him, revealing the glorious mystery of the Incarnation of the Word as accomplished in the womb of Mary. St. Joseph had the happiness of breathing forth his soul assisted both by his foster-son, Jesus, and his holy Spouse, Mary.

PRAYER

O most Blessed Virgin Mary, among the great privileges with which thou wert favored by God, not least must be counted His having appointed as thy spouse and guardian of thy virginity the glorious Patriarch St. Joseph. Obtain for me, I pray thee, that in imitation of this great Saint, I may preserve myself chaste in soul and body, and daily grow in the grace of our Lord. Amen.

Mirror of Justice

VIRTUE OF JUSTICE IN MARY

"With me are riches and glory, glorious riches and justice." (PROV. VIII, 18.)

JUSTICE consists in rendering to God what belongs to God and to man what belongs to man, according to the words of Jesus Christ: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's."¹

Our divine Redeemer was a perfect model of justice. He was not content with rendering to His Father the honor which is His due, adoring Him and fulfilling all His commandments: He willed also to promote justice among men, condemning by word and deed whatsoever is contrary to this virtue.

Further, since fallen man could not satisfy the justice of God, on account of the offenses he had committed against the Divine Majesty, Jesus Christ, true Man, offered Himself to His Eternal Father, to appease His just anger. Thus did our divine Saviour pay to the last farthing the debt contracted by our sins, dying for us

¹ MATT. XXII, 21.

on the tree of the cross, a true victim of expiation. It is with reason, then, that Jesus Christ is called the Sun of Justice. In the light of this divine Sun, we are now able to distinguish good actions from those contaminated by sin.

Let us examine our lives by this shining light, before it comes to pass that the Sovereign Judge of angels and men, who holds the scales of life and death in His hands, summons us before His dread tribunal.

* * *

As Jesus is the Sun of Justice, so is Mary a spotless mirror, in which the justice of the Godhead is so faithfully reflected, as to lead us to the knowledge of Its infinite perfections. And just as a mirror reproduces exactly our features, so in the same way the Blessed Virgin is for us a sure means whereby we may be led to know the perfections of our Saviour.

Whether we consider Mary in her attitude toward God, or review her relations with her most chaste Spouse St. Joseph, or again regard the manner with which she fulfilled her duties toward her neighbor, we may say truly that justice never failed her.

Mary paid to God, with all her heart, the homage of adoration which is His due, attributing nothing to herself of all those treasures of divine grace and perfection with which she was

avored. As for her relations either with her holy Spouse or with her neighbors at large, these always bore the mark of the most perfect justice.

It is with reason, therefore, that we may apply to the Mother of God, the words of the Prophet Isaias: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and with the robe of justice He hath covered me, as a bridegroom decked with a crown and as a bride adorned with her jewels." ¹

* * *

Not only does the consideration of Mary's justice serve to enlighten us as to the perfections of Jesus Christ, but it may also be advantageous in conveying to us a knowledge of the defects of our own justice, whether toward God or toward men. It behoves us to make this self-examination before the day of the Lord comes, that great day of universal reckoning; otherwise the most painful surprises may await us.

When, by comparing our justice to that of Mary, we come to realize our own imperfections and sins, we may well make a true and lowly confession of our wretchedness, saying with the Prophet Isaias: "We are all become as one unclean." ² This candid avowal is in itself the beginning of a sincere conversion calculated to

¹ ISAI. LXI, 10.

² ISAI. LXIV, 6.

lead us on, under the influence of divine grace, to the possession of the kingdom of heaven, where justice and peace shall meet in an everlasting embrace: *Justitia et pax osculatæ sunt.*¹

Happy the soul which often applies itself to the consideration of Mary's perfections, who is a true mirror of justice. It will ascend rapidly from virtue to virtue, realizing in itself our blessed Saviour's words: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect."²

EXAMPLE

MIRACULOUS PICTURE OF THE SANTISSIMA ANNUNZIATA IN FLORENCE

When the Seven Holy Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary were established in the Oratory of Santa Maria di Cafaggio, they decided to have painted a fresco of Our Lady representing her humbly proclaiming herself the handmaid of the Lord when greeted by the Angel. Being desirous that the painting should be worthy of the most holy Mother of God, they entrusted the work to an able and pious artist, named Bartholomew.

The saintly artist, relying on the aid of Heaven

¹ PS. LXXXIV, 11.

² MATT. V, 48.

more than on his own skill, had recourse to Our Lady, fervently praying her that she would deign to direct his hand, that he might represent her in the most fitting manner. When he had completed the figure of the Angel and most of that of Our Lady, there yet remained to paint the features of the holy Mother of God. But how was he to depict the expression of this heavenly Mother in the act of pronouncing her admirable *fiat*, by which she became the Mother of God?

In this perplexity of mind the painter fell into a deep sleep. On awaking, how great was his astonishment to find the picture finished by an invisible hand! The faithful then flocked to witness this miracle and fixing their eyes on the Blessed Virgin, they repeatedly exclaimed: "What an angelical face, what heavenly features, what a celestial expression!" So beautiful indeed was the face of the Mother of God, that Michelangelo himself used to say this could not have been depicted by any human hand, but that it was truly a divine work.

Many were the graces bestowed by Our Lady on those who came to pray before this picture. Before long it was given the title of "Our Lady Saint Mary, full of grace." This was the beginning of many further graces which the mercy of God granted, for more than six centuries, to those who came to invoke the Mother of God at this shrine.

Many people eminent for virtue came and knelt before this heavenly picture to implore Our Lady's aid. It was before this wondrous picture that St. Aloysius Gonzaga made his vow of perpetual virginity. Here, also, both St. Charles Borromeo and in after years, Pope Pius IX, knelt in prayer and shed tears of tender devotion.

PRAYER

O Mary, when I consider my own justice, I perceive, alas! that it is hardly better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees.¹ I implore thee, therefore, that thou obtain for me of thy Son the grace ever to grow in this virtue, in order that, like thyself, I may serve the Lord with faithfulness, and thus come at last to eternal bliss. Amen.

¹ MATT. V, 20.

Seat of Wisdom

GIFT OF WISDOM IN MARY

"I, wisdom, dwell in counsel, and am present in learned thoughts." (PROV. VIII, 12.)

WISDOM is the most precious gift of the Holy Spirit, for it is properly the fruit of charity, the most excellent treasure that one may ever possess in this life.

This holy gift consists in a disposition of our mind to regard and regulate all things by the light of the divine law. Many there are who spend much time to perfect themselves in human science, or the liberal arts. They will toil day and night, in order to succeed in their artistic or scientific undertakings. Others, given over to wickedness, employ all their industry in finding occasion to sin with impunity. But to know Thee, O my God, to discern wisely between Thy paths that lead on to life, and the dangerous ways of the world, there is no need that one should employ so much study nor such toilsome labor: an upright heart, animated by Thy grace, is all that is required, for "the unction of Thy Spirit teacheth him all things."¹

¹ 1 JOHN, II, 27.

The man who is taught by the Holy Spirit becomes spiritual, that is to say, his understanding is enlightened and his emotions are regulated in such manner, that he "judges all things,"¹ not only discerning good from evil and truth from falsehood, but also ordering every one of his actions by reference to his last end, which is the attainment of eternal life.

* * *

Just as Mary possessed in a surpassing degree the virtue of charity, in like manner was she adorned with the precious gift of wisdom. She could discern as if by instinct the things of heaven from the things of the world, and directed all her actions toward God with that purity of intention proper to souls inebriated with divine love. This wisdom filled her soul with a sweetness beyond compare, and communicated to all her exterior actions a heavenly gentleness, for of this virtue it is written that "its conversation hath no bitterness, nor its company any tediousness, but joy and gladness."²

True wisdom bears the impress of seven supernatural qualities, which are, as it were, so many pillars, on which it rests. St. James thus describes these seven qualities. "The wisdom that is from above," says he, "first indeed is

¹ 1 COR. II, 15.

² WISD. VIII, 16.

chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation.”¹

Such were the supports whereon the precious gift of wisdom reposed in Mary. Like a majestic tower which rears itself heavenward, firm and strong, this peerless Virgin, filled with divine wisdom, kept her spirit constantly raised toward the supernatural regions, where she contemplated with grateful wonder, the words of the Most High. Her thoughts were continually in heaven,² where, together with the blessed spirits, she adored the ways of the Lord in her regard, conforming herself in all things to His good pleasure. “Wisdom hath built herself a house, she hath hewn her out seven pillars.”³

* * *

As much as heavenly wisdom is beautiful and resplendent, by so much is earthly wisdom, which St. James does not hesitate to call “sensual, devilish,”⁴ dark and unsightly. This worldly wisdom is full of zeal, but a poisonous zeal, spreading everywhere dissension and trouble. It goes in search of the seductions of sense: it is haughty and arrogant, inclined to judge and to weigh in the scales of malevolence

¹ JAMES, III, 17.

² PHIL. III, 20.

³ PROV. XI, 1.

⁴ JAMES, III, 15.

the neighbor's actions: it is full of hypocrisy and deceit: its end is to light on all sides the brand of discord: it leads irreparably to eternal ruin.

As day differs from night and life from death, even so does heavenly wisdom differ from the wisdom of this world. To the latter may be applied the words of the book of Proverbs: "There is a way that seemeth just to a man: but the ends thereof lead to death."¹

Let us ask of God that He keep us from so great an evil. Let us beseech Him to fill our hearts with the precious gift of heavenly wisdom.

EXAMPLE

ST. BERNARD

St. Bernard, the great Doctor of the Church, and, as he is called, the last of the Fathers, was famous for the holiness of his life and the splendor of his doctrine. In an especial way he excels all sacred writers by the sweetness and unction with which he treats of the grandeur and prerogatives of the glorious Mother of God. He was born at Fontaine, in Burgundy, in 1091, of pious and noble parents, who gave him a good Christian education. Thus, even from his youth, he led a virtuous life full of charitable works.

¹ PROV. XIV, 12.

One year, on Christmas night, he was favored with a heavenly vision. The Divine Child appeared to him and deigned to instruct him in the glorious mystery of the Incarnation, which the Church celebrates at that time. From this vision there arose in him that tender devotion and ardent love for the Mother of God, which the Saint afterward transfused into the hearts of many, through the sermons he wrote in her honor. Our Lady failed not to correspond to this love of Bernard for her by showing a special predilection for her faithful servant. She granted him extraordinary favors. And so this devotion to the Queen of Heaven, which is the source of great fruit to souls, produced in the heart of St. Bernard this result: it made him realize that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. So, at the age of twenty-two, he left his father's home and asked to be admitted into the Cistercian Order.

So great was his fervor in consecrating himself to God, that he persuaded many of his kinsmen and acquaintances to follow him in the religious life, which they did, although they had previously opposed his decision. In religion he showed himself a perfect example of every virtue. Being placed at the head of his monastery, he restored discipline and founded many abbeys in which the regular observance was kept up for a long time.

As St. Bernard was much given to the study of Holy Scripture and to meditating on the eternal truths, he acquired such treasure of knowledge, that he merited to be numbered among the most shining lights of the Church. The Roman Pontiffs many times entrusted him with important and delicate missions, such as pacifying cities and repressing vice and disorder, all of which the Saint carried out successfully with the help of Mary.

Finally, worn out with fatigue and excessive penances, he peacefully breathed forth his soul to God, on the twentieth of August, 1174, in the sixty-third year of his age.

PRAYER

O Mary, obtain for us of thy Son, we pray thee, a large share of the gift of divine wisdom, a gift so precious, that all the treasures of earth are nothing in comparison. In virtue of this heavenly gift, we shall easily come to the possession of that peace which the Saviour brought upon earth. That peace, which is the tranquillity of order, will make us merit the glorious title of "sons of God,"¹ and will bring us to the blessed country. Amen.

¹ MATT. v, 9.

Cause of Our Joy

THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY INTO HEAVEN

"Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke, of aromatical spices, of myrrh and frankincense?" (CANT. III, 6.)

WHEN the moment had come, chosen by the Incarnate Word, to celebrate His mystic and solemn nuptials with the Bride of His Heart, He chose to reveal Himself to her in all His beauty, inviting her to come and taste the ineffable delights which the clear vision of the Divine Essence conveys to the soul.

That vision was the reward of the ardent love which Mary, since her conception, had entertained for her God, and which from that time forward, had gone on augmenting in her soul. That love at last touched its summit, and the time had come when it must receive, from the infinite bounty of God, its final crown, in the clear and immediate manifestation of the Divine Essence to her intelligence. But it is impossible to see God face to face in a steady and permanent manner, and to go on living the mortal life of the body. Wherefore, at the disclosure of that ineffable vision, the bond which held the

soul of Mary united to her body burst asunder, and she entered at once into the Court of Heaven.

The day on which Mary made her entrance into heaven, was for the glorious host of the angels, a day of exceeding gladness. These blessed spirits welcomed the most pure soul of the Mother of the Word, with tokens of profoundest reverence. Their gaze could not be sated by the contemplation of this creature's beauty, who had ever preserved inviolate the lily of her Immaculate Conception, and they asked one of another in amazement: "Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke, of aromatical spices, of myrrh and frankincense?"

* * *

The separation of Mary's soul from her hallowed body lasted but an instant. Scarcely was her soul admitted permanently to the vision of the Divine Essence, the source of all delight, than, without turning aside her glance from that inebriating vision, it resumed, rapid as the lightning, its holy body, in order to dwell with it forever in the splendor of Heaven.

Mary, then, glorified in soul and body, ascended to the realms of light, just as her Son had done on the day of the Ascension. She ascended, not by the aid of any external power, even angelic, but by that force of agility which the resurrection imparts to the glorified body. Mary as-

cended to heaven as a beautiful bird soars into the azure depths of the firmament; she ascended up to the footsteps of God's throne, by whom she was crowned Queen of heaven and earth. "Come from Libanus, my Spouse, come from Libanus, come, thou shalt be crowned." ¹

Admire, O my soul, this ravishing spectacle, and thank God for the wonders He has wrought in this incomparable Virgin, who, despite her greatness, always remains for thee a Mother full of tenderness and pity.

* * *

The Assumption of Mary, while it was for her the crowning of a life altogether supernatural and divine, was also for the human race a fresh cause of joy and triumph.

Just as the patriarchs in Limbo had beheld the birth of Mary as the breaking of that dawn which announced to them their near deliverance, so, too, the Assumption of this unrivaled Queen, together with the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ, became for mortal man a sure pledge of resurrection and immortality.

Man is in himself but a weak creature, and great are the woes he must bear in this life; nevertheless, so potent are the succors of divine grace, that notwithstanding our misery, we can, through that divine help, come to share with the

¹ CANT. IV, 8.

holy angels the vision of God in heaven. But to attain so lofty an end, the Christian must fight valiantly all his life through. He must use violence with himself, in order to grow continually in the practice of virtue and the love of God, according to the words of the Apostle: "I press toward the mark, to the prize of the supernatural vocation of God in Christ Jesus."¹

Weary not, O my soul, in the pursuit of perfection wherein thou art now engaged. Mary's portion shall be thine if, like her, thou art faithful in thy correspondence with grace.

EXAMPLE

ST. STANISLAUS KOSTKA

The Blessed Virgin, Mother most pure, delights in an especial manner in souls which are pure and chaste, and thus it is that chastity and the love of Mary are always found together. The young Stanislaus Kostka was most devout to our blessed Lady, so much so that from his infancy he had acquired the habit of reciting the Rosary every day in her honor. While still a youth, he loved to speak of Mary, and used to take as the subject of his exercises and scholastic essays, the virtues and prerogatives of this heavenly Queen.

But it was God's will that Stanislaus should

¹ PHIL. III, 14.

not remain long in the world. Having fallen seriously ill the Blessed Virgin appeared to him with the Child Jesus in her arms, and assured him that it was the will of God that he should join the Society of Jesus. As soon as the pious youth recovered, he hastened to carry out the design of Heaven, but was prevented there and then by the opposition of his parents.

At last, he found means to go to Rome on foot, and being received by the General of the Society was admitted into the novitiate. In this new state of life he was found to be adorned with every virtue and possessed of an extraordinary gift of prayer, from which he drew many graces and spiritual consolations. Above all, devotion to Our Lady grew in him more and more; so that he seemed to have no other thought but to please the Queen of Heaven and was ever meditating on her grandeur, lovingly conversing with her. In his speech he always liked to extol her great prerogatives, and used to confer with his companions as to how they might more fittingly honor her.

So great was his love for Mary, that as the Feast of the Assumption drew nigh, he conceived an earnest desire to die on this great solemnity. He knew by revelation that his petition had been heard, and implored the intercession of St. Lawrence, his protector for that month, that he might help him to die a saintly death.

On the feast of this Saint, Stanislaus suddenly became ill and, contrary to medical opinion, the malady was found to be of a serious nature. On the vigil of the Assumption he received the last sacraments, and rejoicing in his approaching death, he fervently prayed to Jesus and Mary. Our blessed Lady appeared to him in his last moments and lovingly consoled him, and she herself received that beautiful soul and took it up with her to heaven.

PRAYER

O glorious Virgin Mary, by whom our sorrow has been changed into joy, obtain for us that we may live in such manner, that we may one day contemplate thy greatness. Intercede also with thy Divine Son to obtain the deliverance of the souls suffering in purgatory that they may be admitted without delay to everlasting bliss. Amen.

Spiritual Vessel

PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE

"Hearken, daughter, and see, and incline thy ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house. And the king shall greatly desire thy beauty."

(Ps. XLIV, 11, 12.)

ACCORDING to a tradition dear to the Christian heart, the most Holy Virgin, when three years of age, was prompted by the Holy Spirit to consecrate herself to God in the Temple of Jerusalem. Mary then made a perfect holocaust of herself, dedicating to God her body, by the vow of chastity, and her will, by the vow of obedience, and renouncing forever the goods of this world, by the vow of poverty.

It were indeed impossible to say with what perfection, with what fervor, she made this offering of herself to the Most High, or how pleasing this holocaust was in the eyes of her Maker. The noble-minded Virgin could in all truth say with the Psalmist: "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup; it is thou that will restore my inheritance to me." ¹

On His side, the Almighty could but repay His

¹ Ps. xv, 5.

beloved Spouse with the most precious gifts. We may well believe that, at the moment of her presentation in the Temple, Mary was favored by an invisible mission of the Holy Ghost, in as much as this Divine Spirit imparted to her a fresh increase of extraordinary grace which raised her at once into a higher sphere of sanctity. The same thing happened at other solemn epochs in her life, as for example at the Annunciation and at the death of Jesus upon the cross.

* * *

On the day of her presentation in the Temple, Mary laid the foundation of that humble hidden life, in which, by the practice of the sublimest virtues, she was to reach that supereminent degree of holiness, to which she was predestined as Mother of the Word and inseparable companion of the Redeemer. Attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit, she sedulously gathered up all His lessons, preserving them in her soul with a jealous care: "I will lead her into the wilderness," said the Lord, "and I will speak to her heart." ¹

All the while that she abode in the Temple, Mary spent her life in the practice of the loftiest virtues. There, in silence and solitude, she could ascend the mystical ladder of contemplation, conversing with her Well-Beloved, hearkening to His

¹ OMAR, II, 14.

voice, and saying to Him with accents of fondest love: "Let Thy voice sound in mine ears, for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely." ¹

There also, in the unremitting perusal of the Holy Scriptures, she meditated on the life of the promised Messiah, and in the consideration of His future sufferings, she gave vent to sentiments of tenderest compassion. "My heart is turned within me, for I am full of bitterness." ² There she gave herself to works of penance and charity, even so that with her own hands she wrought garments for the poor, or priestly vestments for the service of the Sanctuary, wherein the legal sacrifices took place, typical of the great Sacrifice of the Cross.

* * *

Mary's life in the Temple may well serve as a rule of conduct not only for Religious, but also for persons in the world.

The former have only to raise their eyes to that supreme pattern, in order to feel themselves drawn, after Mary's example, often to renew in their hearts the offering of themselves to God by the reiteration of their religious vows. Let them ponder how jealously the future Mother of God watched over the spotless flower of her chastity, how she shunned worldly pleasures and

¹ CANT. II, 14.

² LAMENT. I, 20.

amusements, with what promptitude and exactness she obeyed the precepts of the Law.

As regards persons in the world, they too may learn from the example of the Mother of God to retire ever and anon into solitude, to muse in silence upon the eternal truths. Let them bear in mind that earthly things pass away like a breath, and that no time is well employed, that is not somehow expended in the service of God. "They have called the people happy that hath these things: but happy is that people whose God is the Lord."¹

EXAMPLE

ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

St. Paul of the Cross, Founder of the Congregation of Clerks Regular of the Cross, or Passionists, was one of the most ardent lovers of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of the sorrows of Mary. By his continued meditation on the sorrows of Jesus and Mary, and by his spirit of penance and mortification, he merited to attain to a high degree of sanctity. He was wont to say that anyone going to the Crucified Lord will also find our blessed Lady, for where the Son is, there is the Mother also. Indeed, one

¹ Ps. cxlvi, 15.

of the fruits of his great devotion to the passion of Jesus, which from his youth he had acquired at the foot of the cross, was a tender compassion for the sorrows of Mary, so that he could not reflect on the sufferings of Jesus without bewailing those of His Mother.

How pleasing were these sentiments of compassion to our blessed Lady, is manifest from the many occasions on which she deigned to appear to him and from the many revelations she made to her faithful servant with regard to the sufferings which she endured with her Son Jesus. It can scarcely be said how St. Paul was confirmed in fervor by these revelations; what great light he received in meditating on the work of our redemption; and what ardor he infused into his Religious and into all with whom he came in contact, for their advancement along the true path of sanctity.

Striking events are recorded in connection with his devotion to the sorrows of Mary. One year, on Good Friday, he wished to deprive himself of the food allowed by his rule, even though he was lying ill in his cell. When some one insisted that he should at least take a little nourishment, he, remembering the sorrows of Our Lady cried out, "O dear Mother, this day thou didst stand at the foot of the cross oppressed with grief, and there was none to console thee."

Later on, he managed to crawl into the chapel to pour out his love freely before the Blessed Sacrament.

When St. Paul of the Cross was on the point of death, Our Lady deigned to appear to him, in company with the Heavenly Court, inviting him into paradise. He was overcome with joy at the invitation and peacefully breathed forth his saintly soul in the year 1775. And thus the words of the Psalmist were verified in him: "They that sow in tears shall reap with joy." ¹

PRAYER

O Mary, whose heart, like a costly vessel, was filled, during thy sojourn in the Temple, with the sweetest perfume of good works, obtain for me, I pray thee, to serve with faithfulness, Jesus Christ thy Son, all the days of my life, and to die in His holy service. Amen.

¹ Ps. cxxv, 5.

Vessel of Honor

MARY'S VISITATION

"And Mary rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda. And she entered into the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth." (LUKE, I, 39, 40.)

SCARCELY had the most Holy Virgin learned from the mouth of the Angel Gabriel that her cousin Elizabeth was already for six months with child, than, prompted by the Holy Spirit, she started on her journey to go and see her, in order to assist and alleviate her by her presence.

We may suppose that Mary was accompanied in this journey by St. Joseph, to whom she had truly been united by the bonds of matrimony before the Annunciation. This holy pair, recking of nought but the impulse of their charitable hearts, left their own home and hastened whither the Spirit of God summoned them. Thus did Mary begin her mission of Mediatrix between Jesus Christ and mankind, by bearing to Elizabeth and John the Forerunner, the graces which the Saviour held in reserve for these two saintly personages.

Admire, O my soul, the promptitude of Mary's

correspondence with the motion of the Holy Spirit. Consider her eagerness in following the inspirations from on High, despite the fatigues and inconveniences of a long journey. Oh, how Elizabeth, seized with amazement at the sight of such charity, had reason to cry out: "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my God should come to me?"¹

* * *

The joy of Elizabeth and the exultation of John are a striking proof of the copious blessings which Mary's visit brought to the soul of the Precursor and that of his mother. The Holy Virgin showed herself, on this occasion, to be that which in truth she is and always will be to the end of time, the treasure-house, and dispenser of heavenly graces.

Holy Scripture teaches us that when the Ark of the Covenant entered into the house of Obededom, God blessed that house and all that was therein.² In like manner scarcely had the Immaculate Virgin entered into the house of Elizabeth, than the Holy Ghost began to diffuse His choicest graces upon the members of that privileged family: St. John was cleansed of original sin, his mother received an increase of grace, and Zachary was enriched, though somewhat later, with the gift of prophecy.

¹ LUKE, I, 43.

² 1 PAR. XIII, 14.

We may with reason then liken Mary to a field, wherein a costly treasure lies hid.¹ This treasure is none other than Jesus Christ, the Author of all good, who became incarnate in the most pure womb of the Virgin, and who never ceases to dwell in her by the plenitude of His grace. Therefore, it is true to say that "all grace of the way and of the truth"² is found in Mary.

If, then, we would possess divine grace, if we would surely find Jesus, it is through Mary that we must seek Him, for it is written of the Wise Kings that they found the Messiah promised by the prophets, nowhere else than in the arms of His Blessed Mother: "They found the Child with Mary, His Mother."³

* * *

The Angel had saluted Mary as full of grace; now it is St. Elizabeth who sounds the praises of the Mother of God: "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."⁴ Earth and heaven unite their voices to proclaim Mary blessed, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of men, for it is through her that all grace and blessing come to us.

It was at this moment that Mary sung her beau-

¹ MATT. XIII, 44.

² ECOLUS. XXIV, 25.

³ MATT. II, 11.

⁴ LUKE, I, 42.

tiful canticle, the "Magnificat," the first recorded in the pages of the New Testament. The Virgin-prophetess gave free vent to her sentiments of gratitude and love toward the Lord God Almighty, who had been pleased to accomplish in and by her such marvelous works.

Contemplate, O my soul, the admirable sentiments which breathe through this sublime canticle; see how Mary abandoned herself without reserve to the will of the Most High, humbly acknowledging her own nothingness. Thus, she became more and more dear to the heart of God, whose predilection is for the humble and lowly.

EXAMPLE

ST. FRANCES FRÉMIOT DE CHANTAL

St. Frances Frémiot de Chantal, being a widow consecrated her time to works of piety and mercy, in all things seeking only the glory of God. When her spiritual director, St. Francis de Sales, told her that it was the will of God that, leaving the world, she should consecrate herself to Him, she received this command as coming from God Himself. So great was her fortitude in carrying out this design, that she did not hesitate, in leaving her home, to pass over the body of her

son, who failing in his entreaty to her to change her resolution, had flung himself across the threshold.

Retiring from the world with some of her companions, she placed herself under the direction of St. Francis de Sales and founded a new Congregation, to which that holy Bishop gave the name of the "Visitation." The beginning of this new foundation was very difficult, because the Sisters were extremely poor and sometimes even in need of their daily bread.

Moreover, outward enemies continually threatened the existence of the convent. But, trusting in God and encouraged by the charity of St. Francis, the Sisters bore all this cheerfully, serving their heavenly Spouse with great devotion. To the cultivation of such beautiful Christian virtues as charity, humility, simplicity and patience, they united a tender devotion to Our Lady, in order to arrive at a more perfect union with God, who is the end of all things.

Great was the profit that the Religious derived from this last practice. St. Frances herself reached such a stage of perfection, that she wished to make a vow of doing in everything that which was most perfect. So holy a life could not but draw down on the new Congregation the blessing of Heaven. Indeed, the number of Sisters became so great, that the Saint was invited to found another convent. The holy

Foundress zealously applied herself to this work and notwithstanding many obstacles, she saw her efforts crowned with success.

She died a holy death at Moulins on the thirteenth of December, 1641. Under the guidance of Mary, the Congregation of the Visitation soon flourished in the Church, and sent forth to heaven many holy souls, among whom must be mentioned St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, to whom Our Lord deigned to reveal how pleasing to Him is the devotion to His most Sacred Heart.

PRAYER

O Mary, chosen vessel of honor, treasures of heavenly graces, deign to visit my soul, bringing with thee Jesus, thy only and true Son. Grant that by His help, I may calm the tumult of my passions, and that all the powers of my soul may breathe forth the fragrance of the most excellent virtues. Amen.

Vessel of Singular Devotion

THE PURIFICATION OF MARY

“And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His Mother: Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted; and thine own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.”

(LUKE, II, 34, 35.)

ACCORDING to the law of Moses, the woman who had brought into the world a man-child, was to abstain from going into the Temple for forty days. After which time, she was to journey to Jerusalem, and there offer for her purification a lamb with a pigeon or turtle-dove; or by concession, if she were poor, a pair of turtle-doves or pigeons.¹

The conception of Christ in the womb of our blessed Lady was the work of the Holy Ghost, and hence Mary was not subject to this law in as much as it implied satisfaction for any fault whatever. But that same spirit of humility which had induced Jesus, though immune from all stain of origin, to obey the law of circumci-

¹ LEV. XII, 8.

sion, impelled Mary also to submit to the law of purification.

The Holy of Holies having come upon earth to take away the sins of the world,¹ chose to appear among us as a sinner. It was therefore befitting that His Immaculate Mother, destined to coöperate with Him in the work of our redemption, should teach the world, by her submission to the law of purification, this great truth, that humility is the beginning of our salvation, as pride has been the root of our ruin. And just as Jesus willed to be born in poverty, so also Mary appeared in the Temple stripped of the goods of this world, for which reason she made to God the offering of the poor.

O holy humility, how pleasing art thou in the sight of the Most High, since it was to teach us lowliness, that the Word of God came down upon earth!

* * *

Mary went to the Temple of Jerusalem not only to be purified in accordance with the Law, but also to offer to God the Child Jesus, her new-born Son: *Ut sisterent eum Domino.*"²

The Law commanded that all newly born male children should be consecrated to the Lord. This precept was designed to recall to the He-

¹ JOHN, I, 29.

² LUKE, II, 22.

brews the memory of the passage of the destroying-Angel, who slew the first-born of Egypt, but spared the children of the Israelites. Later on however, God having, in place of the first-born of the Hebrews, set apart for the priesthood the entire tribe of Levi, the custom was introduced that the parents should immediately ransom their first-born at the price of five shekels. Mary and Joseph offered therefore this mystic ransom at the Temple, in a spirit of obedience.

But to what purpose was Jesus thus ransomed? Why, having been once offered to God, was He restored again to His parents? Ah, it is because He was the victim destined for the sacrifice of Golgotha, and it was necessary that the victim should be kept for the day of its immolation. Mary and Joseph are well aware of this. Being fully acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, they know that the Messias must accomplish the work of redemption by His death.

But, in order that the designs of God may be brought home to them with greater force, behold the Prophet Simeon, inspired by the Holy Spirit comes into the Temple, takes into his arms the Divine Infant and, blessing God, turns to Mary, foretelling her the bitter sorrow which, like a sharp sword, must one day pierce her sinless soul.

* * *

The holy old man Simeon knew well that the Messiah was born only of Mary, and that to her alone would one day belong the offering up of Jesus upon Calvary. Therefore, though his benediction equally included St. Joseph, yet it was to the Mother of God alone that he addressed the prophetic utterance. These words were, for the heart of the Immaculate Virgin, a cause of unspeakable grief, though at the same time of exceeding joy.

In fact, Mary perceived that if Jesus was to be a contradicted sign, it was by reason of the envy of men, which would drive them to such a pitch of malice, as to become guilty of deicide. She understood that this persecution must of necessity include herself also, the true Mother of the Redeemer.

But if the Saviour is to be for many an occasion of perdition, He will also prove, for those who are ready and willing to accept His teaching, a source of grace, so that in His name and by His power they will become victors over sin and death. This thought sufficed to console Mary and to animate her for the fulfillment of her mission.

EXAMPLE

THE DEVOTION OF POPE CLEMENT VIII
TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

Among the Sovereign Pontiffs who have nourished a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, particular mention must be made of Clement VIII, through whom the picture of Our Lady, venerated in St. Mary Major's at Rome and known as St. Luke's picture, became a center of great devotion.

As soon as he was crowned Pope, he proclaimed a jubilee to all who should visit the chapel where the picture is preserved, and, desiring to give an example of true devotion to the Mother of God, he himself went thrice in procession to visit the shrine, followed by the Sacred College of Cardinals, the Pontifical Court, and a large body of the faithful.

When his nephew, John Francis Aldobrandini was about to set out with an army to help the Hungarians against the Turks, the Holy Pontiff wished to put the valiant soldier under the protection of Our Lady, of whom we read that she is splendid as the sun, beautiful as the moon, and terrible as an army in battle array. To this end he held a solemn ceremony in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, during which, under the motherly regard of our blessed Lady, he ap-

pointed Francis general, giving him the banner under which the Christian name was to triumph.

But what especially distinguished the devotion of this Pontiff to our blessed Lady was his custom of going every morning on foot with one of the pontifical household to venerate this shrine in the Church of St. Mary Major. On arriving there, he was wont to go up the steps leading to the Basilica, on his knees, out of reverence for the Mother of God. He used to remain there humbly waiting for the "Angelus" to be rung, at which hour the Basilica would be opened. Then he recited the "Angelus" thus honoring her who is known as the heavenly dawn; after which, he went to prostrate himself before the Sacred Picture, which he contemplated in ecstasy, breathing forth the love of his heart for Mary.

Paul V, who succeeded Clement VIII in the Chair of St. Peter, wished to perpetuate the devotion of his predecessor to this sacred shrine by erecting a splendid monument to his memory in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin. Prince Marcantonio Borghese had the body of Pope Clement VIII transferred there from the Vatican, so that even in death he might render homage to her, whom he had loved so much in life.

PRAYER

O Mary, who hast given us in thy Purification, so bright an example of true and sincere devotion, and whose sweet heart was at once pierced with sorrow and filled with heavenly joy at the prophecy of Simeon, grant that I may imitate thee, and obey the commandments of Jesus, in such wise, that I may have part in the Redemption which He has won for us. Amen.

Mystical Rose

VIRTUE OF CHARITY IN MARY

"I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope."

(ECCLUS. XXIV, 24.)

CHARITY, the queen of all virtues, unites us so closely to God, our Supreme Good and our last end, that sin alone is capable of dissolving this union. Sin, therefore, is the sole obstacle to the presence of divine charity in our souls.

The union which charity cements between the soul and God, is far from barren: it manifests itself in acts of love, and on given occasions, it inspires generous sacrifices, in honor of this same God, who loves us with a love beyond all bounds, and who is Himself the principal object of the virtue of charity.

The title "Mystical Rose," which the Church gives to Mary, expresses well the fact of the presence of this precious virtue in the most holy soul of our heavenly Mother. Mary was without spot. Consecrated wholly to the Lord, her soul exhaled without ceasing, an exquisite perfume as of a sweet rose. She therefore pleased the

King of kings to such a point that she was dearer to Him than all other creatures put together.

What tongue could recount the shafts of love which the Holy Virgin sent forth toward the God of her heart, the ardent aspirations of her soul, as she repeated with the Spouse of the Canticles: "Show me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou liest in the midday."¹ This love of Mary's was not inactive; it expanded in acts of noblest and sublimest sacrifice. These acts reached their summit upon Calvary, when the Mother of Jesus offered to God the Divine Victim for the salvation of the human race.

* * *

Holy charity embraces in its loving clasp not only God, but also our neighbor. To love men with a true love, to desire their well-being, to succor them in their need, to console them in their afflictions, to bear with their defects: such are the secondary effects of the excellent theological virtue of charity.

No one, after Jesus, practiced charity toward men better than Mary. In fact, did not this loving Mother offer to God her own Son for the world's salvation and, in view of our redemption, hold herself ready to share in all the sufferings which He would endure during His mortal life? Did not her charity urge her to accompany to

¹ CANT. I, 6.

Calvary Him whom she loved above her own self, and to offer Him to the Eternal Father for our sins? And now that Mary has been crowned in heaven Queen of the Universe, she does not cease to shelter us under the mantle of her maternal charity, imploring of God consolation for the afflicted, repentance for the sinful, and final perseverance for the just.

O Mary, how beautiful this charity renders thee in the eyes of God and men! The moon's silver sheen, the golden sunlight, are but a feeble image of the incomparable loveliness which this ardent charity toward God and man imparts to thee. Truly thou art "fair as the moon, bright as the sun."¹

* * *

It was by reason of her immense charity that God loved Mary more than any other creature, for this divine virtue consists precisely in an interchange of the most tender and heartfelt love and good will between the lover and the beloved. The following words spoken formerly of Queen Esther, are therefore perfectly applicable to the Mother of God: "The king loved her more than all the other women; and she had favor and kindness before him above all, and he set the royal crown on her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti."²

¹ CANT. VI, 9.

² ESTHER, II, 17.

Endeavor, O my soul, to make return for the love wherewith God loves thee, by loving Him with all thy heart, and seeking to grow daily in conformity to His holy will; for, by this alone, is divine charity made manifest. But above all, see that thou avoidest sin with the utmost care; not merely mortal sin, which is an insurmountable obstacle to the possession of this holy virtue, but venial sin also, which, by diminishing the fervor of charity, leads the soul little by little to the commission of mortal sin.

Sin, ah, this is of a truth the enemy of our souls, the greatest evil which can befall us upon earth.

EXAMPLE

ST. ROSE OF LIMA

St. Rose of Lima was the first flower of signal holiness to blossom in South America. She was named "Rose" because, when but a few months old, her face was miraculously transfigured like that of a most lovely rose, in sign of her angelic purity and ardent charity.

When she reached the age of reason and was already endowed with heavenly blessings, she dreaded to become vain of the name given her, thinking herself unworthy of bearing it. But our blessed Lady appeared to her, assuring her

that this name was most dear to her Divine Son; and moreover, in token for her own affection, she bade Rose be called henceforth "Rose of St. Mary."

From contemplation of God, her only Good, Rose conceived such a low esteem for the things of this world and so great a love for suffering, that she began to lead a life of solitude and austerity. Her penance moved all who knew her to admiration. She treated her body so harshly that from the sole of her foot to the crown of her head no soundness was found in her. In the midst of her hardest sufferings she used to exclaim: "O my Lord Jesus Christ, increase my sufferings, but increase, too, the flame of thy divine charity in my heart."

As she was not able to leave her home, she joined the Third or Secular Order of St. Dominic in order to render herself ever more conformed to her Divine Spouse. She made herself a little cell in a corner of her father's garden and there she passed her days in continual prayer, uninterrupted by any distraction.

Such union with God merited signal favors, such as that of hearing from our blessed Lord Himself these words: "Rose, beloved of My Heart, thou shalt be My Spouse." To which she replied: "O Lord, I am but Thy servant. The brands of my servitude will not allow me to be raised to the dignity of Thy Spouse." But

the Blessed Virgin appeared to her with her Son, assuring her that truly, because of the charity that reigned in her heart, she was worthy of being called the Spouse of Jesus.

This glorious name was no mere title of honor, for it inspired her with a still stronger desire to suffer, the better to please the Spouse of her soul. Finally, worn away by penance, after having twice repeated "Jesus, be with me," she died a holy death in the year 1617.

PRAYER

O Mary, mystical rose of perfect charity, I rejoice that thou didst possess this inestimable gift to such a degree, as to become the choice Spouse of the Holy Spirit. Grant, I pray thee, that after thy example, I may detest sin above all evils, and may always increase in the possession of so precious a gift, according to the words of St. Peter: "Grow always in grace and in the knowledge of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." ¹ Amen.

¹ 2 PETER, III, 18.

Tower of David

GIFT OF STRENGTH IN MARY

"Thy neck is as the tower of David, which is built with bulwarks: a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armor of valiant men."

(CANT. IV, 4.)

WHEN we reflect on the good which we are required to do, and on the sufferings we must endure to attain to eternal felicity, it is impossible, however short our experience of this life may be, to refrain from a sentiment of fear, at the sight of the difficulties and contradictions which await us on all sides.

Three enemies, let loose by original sin, are leagued together with our native weakness against us: they accompany us at all times, constituting a perpetual obstacle to the acquisition of the crown for which we are striving. These are the devil with his snares, the flesh with its perverse inclinations, and the world with its allurements. These three enemies wage against us a dire and ceaseless warfare, so that, were it not for a special aid given us from above, it would be impossible to withstand their onset. We should, then, render thanks to the infinite good-

ness of God, who arms us by the gift of strength with a holy courage, thus giving us hope of escape from all dangers, and a firm assurance of reaching, if we are but faithful, the end of our labors and the goal of our desires.

Rest thyself, O my soul, upon the arm of thy loving Saviour, He who tempers the wind to the downy fledgeling, will give thee patience to support the ills of this life, and strength to overcome the enemies of thy salvation: "Through my God I shall go over a wall." ¹

* * *

If we consider, on the one hand, the grandeur of the mission to which Mary was predestined, and, on the other, the innumerable obstacles she had to surmount, not indeed as regards the flesh, since she was immaculate, but on the part of the devil and the world, we perceive that, humanly speaking, this Holy Virgin had much to cause her to lose heart. How will a creature, holy indeed, but of herself feeble, be able to find the necessary strength to accomplish so great an enterprise? How will Mary be able to overthrow the redoubtable foes that beset her on all hands? St. Paul gives us the decisive answer: "Through the grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord." ²

Yes, the grace which was to be given to Mary,

¹ Ps. xvii, 29.

² Rom. vii, 25.

we may say almost without measure, in virtue of the merits of her Son Jesus Christ, strengthened her to overcome all dangers. It caused her to triumph over all difficulties, and enabled her to fulfill perfectly her mission of co-Redemptress in the restoration of the human race. Divine grace sustained her in her afflictions and toils: whilst her soul, firm as a rock in the midst of a raging sea, reposed upon God, her Saviour, as a child in its mother's arms.

The thought of the divine assistance animated Mary when, foreseeing the sufferings she would have to undergo, she uttered full of confidence the prophetic words: "He hath showed might in His arm: He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart."¹

* * *

The combats to which we are exposed in this life are indeed hard and unceasing. We must, therefore, arm ourselves with courage and beg the divine assistance, to be able to overcome our spiritual foes, to surmount the obstacles which block our pathway, and to achieve the final goal of our endeavors. By these aids, included in the gift of strength, we may rest sure of victory, provided however we correspond with grace: for we do not fight alone, God having promised to be always with us.

¹ LUKE, I, 51.

Still, if we have need of the gift of strength to enable us to fight courageously and to resist the enemies of our salvation, it is no less necessary to help us in bearing patiently the ills which fall to our lot from the cradle to the grave. We are worth nothing without the supernatural gift of strength. On the other hand, it is comparatively easy for us to work out our eternal salvation with the help of this gift, and we can repeat with the Apostle: "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? . . . I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God." ¹

EXAMPLE

ST. RAYMOND NONNATUS

St. Raymond Nonnatus (*not born*), was so called because his mother died before giving him birth. From his early years he placed himself entirely in the hands of Our Lady. He began then to feel a strong inclination to the ecclesiastical state, but he encountered great opposition from his father, who in order to dissuade him from his purpose, sent him to mind the flocks.

¹ ROM. VIII, 37, 38.

But the saintly youth found means to practice his devotion to Our Lady, by spending many hours daily before her shrine. In honor of Mary he made a vow of perpetual virginity to God and in return he received the grace necessary to overcome the opposition of his father.

Filled with compassion for the hardships of many Christians who had fallen into the hands of the Saracens, he went to Algiers to liberate them, desiring, if possible, to shed his blood for the faith of Jesus Christ. He gave himself entirely to setting free these poor wretches, rescuing them with money and strengthening them in the faith. He also would often encourage them to receive the holy sacraments, by which they might preserve divine grace in their souls.

But this did not satisfy his zeal. He wished, for the love of Jesus, to remain a slave for his beloved brethren. Not only did he suffer fatigues, scorn and derision in his charity toward them, but furthermore he had to bear the assaults of the barbarous pagans, who were determined at all costs to make him apostatize from the faith. Being helped by his heavenly Queen, Raymond bore all his trials with great constancy and even with joy in order to gain souls for heaven.

His own master, irritated by such constancy, at first condemned him to death. However, moved by a strong greed for money, he set aside

his desire for vengeance and commuted this sentence into that of a great number of stripes. Moreover, he ordered Raymond's lips to be pierced and looped with an iron chain, that prevented him from preaching the Christian religion and only allowed of his taking scanty nourishment.

Raymond remained in this painful condition for more than eight months, that is, until the sum of money required for his ransom was obtained. He then returned to Spain, accompanied by the blessings of many Christians whom he had redeemed to life and to the practice of the Catholic Faith. The Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory IX, wished to recompense his labors by raising him to the cardinalate. But God had prepared a more precious reward for him, calling him to partake of the eternal joys of paradise. His death took place in the year 1240.

PRAYER

O Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, true Tower of David, thou didst remain immovable among the contradictions of this life, valiantly fulfilling, by the strength of the Holy Spirit, the part allotted to thee in the work of our redemption. Obtain for me, I beseech thee, of thy Son, a large share of the gift of strength, in order that

I may not lose courage in the battles of life,
but that passing through the troubles of this
world, I may surely attain to everlasting peace.
Amen.

Tower of Ivory

VIRTUE OF HOPE IN MARY

"King Solomon also made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the finest gold."

(3 KINGS, x, 18.)

THE life of a Christian is a life of sacrifices, of contradictions and of sufferings. It is not sufficient for him, if he would be worthy of his name and vocation, to resist the perverse inclinations of sense; he must endure a terrible and ceaseless war from the devil and the world. He cannot promise himself lasting peace in this life; on the contrary, he must always be ready to suffer and to fight.

In such circumstances, it is evident that we need a special virtue to animate us to resistance, to uphold us in the contest, and to comfort us in our afflictions: a virtue which shall keep before our eyes the reward awaiting us and put us in mind of the succors promised by God. The virtue is called hope: it is a bright star which guides man upon the troubled waters of this world, and brings him safely, by a straight course, to the harbor of salvation.

Happy the Christian, who is buoyed up and

encouraged by hope! Rising above the trials of the present life and looking forward to the imperishable goods of eternity, he will one day enter into his heavenly home.

* * *

What we know about Mary's sorrows and the woes she had to endure during the span of her mortal existence, suffices to make us understand, to what an exalted degree this Divine Mother possessed the supernatural virtue of hope.

Jesus was scarcely born, when already the ungodly Herod sought His life, and Mary and Joseph were forced to flee into Egypt, to save the Messias from the edge of the sword. After long years of exile spent in toilsome labor and severe privations, the Holy Family returned to Nazareth, where they continued their life of poverty and privation. During the public life of Jesus, Mary shared all the fatigue, the anguish, and the opprobrium of her Son. She was always with Him, even when Jesus was condemned to undergo a criminal's death upon the cross. Through all this cruel ordeal, Mary was ever by His side, sharing the contempt and insults heaped upon her crucified Son.

And now, what was that hidden power, which upheld the Blessed Virgin in the midst of such great trials? It was trust in the divine promises and the certainty that her Son would restore, by His humiliations and sufferings, the kingdom

of God upon earth, and that He would obtain for mankind forgiveness of their transgressions and for angels a new source of joy. Yes, hope was that supernatural virtue, which consoled and upheld the Mother of God in the midst of her torments; wherefore we may well say of her that "against hope she believed in hope."¹

* * *

The virtue of hope, deeply rooted in Mary's soul, made this holy Virgin to be like unto a tower built of whitest ivory and firmly based upon the rock. Neither the sharpest contradictions, nor the bitterest tribulations could disturb in her that celestial calm with which her confidence in the succor of the All-powerful inspired her soul. Such were her interior dispositions, that she delighted to repeat with holy Job: "Although He should kill me, yet will I trust in Him."² It is no wonder, then, that Mary, sustained by such high hope, should have made to God, with the greatest generosity, the offering of her Son's life together with her own.

Happy the soul animated and upheld by holy hope; it will surely weather every storm and come to the harbor of eternal safety. More than that, it will even "glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial, and trial hope, and hope confoun-

¹ ROM. IV, 18.

² JOB, XIII, 15.

deth not: because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us." ¹

On the other hand, how woeful and piteous is the lot of him who, deprived of hope and despising heavenly things, only cares for the goods of this world! These goods often flee from those that pursue them, and when obtained, cause nothing but weariness and disgust in the soul. Just as the goods of heaven fill the soul with peace and contentment, those of earth only leave it joyless and ill at ease.

EXAMPLE

THE LIBERATION OF VIENNA FROM THE TURKS

The most holy and sweet Name of Mary, the hope and comfort of all Christian souls, is honored by the Church with marked solemnity during the Octave of her Nativity. This honor originated in an event which shows how constant toward her clients is the assistance of the Queen of heaven.

In the year 1683, a formidable army of the Turks invaded Austria and laid siege to Vienna. The town was on the point of surrendering to the enemy and great indeed was the anxiety and fear

¹ ROM. v, 3-5.

of all Christians, because, should it have happened that this stronghold were captured, the Turks could easily invade the rest of Europe and fill it with blood and strife.

From all parts of the Christian world prayers were offered to the Queen of heaven, that she would deign to avert this imminent disaster. Our Lady, the consoler of the afflicted, failed not to hear the prayers of her devoted children. The pious and valiant King of Poland, John Sobieski, after having levied a powerful army, though inadequate for the purpose, marched against the enemy, trusting in the aid of Heaven. When he came in sight of the Turkish camp, before beginning battle, he ordered Holy Mass to be celebrated, at which he himself desired to serve, after which he begged the celebrant to bless the whole army. He then, full of confidence in the help of Mary, threw his forces into the conflict. Marvelous to relate, the enemy, though more numerous, turned and fled, while the King's army, making great havoc of the Turks, remained masters of the field. Great was the joy of all Christians at these tidings, and from all parts fervent prayers were offered to the Blessed Virgin in thanksgiving for the danger which she had averted.

At this time the Chair of Peter was occupied by Innocent XI, who placed all his trust in Mary. He had vowed to institute a solemn

feast in her honor, if she would liberate the Church from this terrible danger. Attributing therefore this wonderful victory to her intercession, he ordered great celebrations to be held everywhere in her honor. In fulfillment of this vow, he extended to the whole Catholic world the solemnity of the Most Holy Name of Mary, which feast, up to that time, had only been observed in some particular churches.

PRAYER

O Mary, our life and our sweetness, thou art, after Jesus Our Lord, our only hope. Graciously intercede for us before the throne of the God of hope, that, "filled with all joy and peace in believing, we may abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Ghost." ¹ Amen.

¹ ROM. xv, 13.

House of Gold

MARY'S HUMILITY

"I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon."

(CANT. I, 4.)

NEXT to charity, there is no virtue more pleasing to God than Christian humility. This virtue, unknown to the heathen, was taught us by God Himself, when He stooped to become man for love of us. And as though such an abasement were not enough, Our Redeemer also chose to lead a life hidden and despised in the sight of men, to such an extent, that St. Paul says of Him: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross."¹

By this we may know how dear humility is to God, and why He often makes use of those who are of little account, but are lowly of heart, to perform great things in His Church. "When thou wert a little one in thine own eyes, wert thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?"²

¹ PHIL. II, 8.

² 1 KINGS, XV, 17.

Admire, O my soul, the wisdom of the Most High, whose ways are so different from those of men, and who delights to choose "the foolish things of the world, that He may confound the wise, and the weak things, that He may confound the strong." ¹

* * *

The unexampled dignity to which Mary was raised, may aid us in forming a just idea of the excellence of the virtue of humility, for it was precisely her profound humility, joined with a supereminent degree of grace and charity, which, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, made the Blessed Virgin worthy to become the Mother of the Incarnate Word.

The virginity which Mary had vowed to God from infancy, had drawn upon her the loving glance of God: all the same, it was to her humility that she owed her elevation to the dignity of Mother of the Word. "By her virginity Mary was made pleasing to the Lord; by her humility she conceived the Word," says St. Bernard.

And in truth, how the humility of the Mother of God shines forth in the Annunciation! At the Angel's words, the meek Virgin is troubled, and inquires within herself what that salutation may mean. The Angel goes on: "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God; behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb; . . . and

¹ 1 COR. I, 27.

He shall be called the Son of the Most High." To these words, by which she came to know her future greatness, the humble Virgin made no other reply but this: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."¹ And throughout her mortal life, Mary never had any other rule of conduct, neither did she ever choose anything else, but the opprobrium of the cross of Christ.

O prodigy of abasement! It is to this that we owe the accomplishment of the great mystery of our Redemption.

* * *

The Christian who would desire to please God and grow in sanctity, must endeavor, after Mary's example, to make continual progress in humility, for it is written that "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."² For this he must in the first place acknowledge that all the gifts he may possess, either of nature or of grace, all his prerogatives of birth or social position come from the hand of God. But, in order to preserve ourselves in holy humility, we must freely submit to the dispositions of God in our regard, and be well content with the portion which He has assigned us, not seeking honors or preëminence, but on the contrary, receiving with resignation, if not

¹ LUKE, I, 38.

² JAMES, IV, 6.

with joy, the humiliations that may befall us.

An attentive perusal of the Holy Scripture will convince us that Mary, during the public life of Jesus, never lost an occasion of sharing in His opprobrium. Let us, then, also choose the cross of Christ and rejoice to be esteemed of little worth by men.

Ask of thy God, O my soul, to shun worldly honors and to receive with perfect submission the humiliations which it may please Him to send thee, remembering the words of the book of Proverbs: "Humility goeth before glory."¹

EXAMPLE

BLESSED ANTHONY OF BITETTO

The unequalled humility of Our Lady who, when the Angel saluted her as Mother of God, protested herself to be the handmaid of the Lord, has excited in the Church numerous acts of heroic abnegation. A striking example of contempt for worldly honors out of love for Mary, is to be found in the life of Blessed Anthony Giacomo, Bishop of Bitetto, a small town of Italy which also was his birthplace.

It happened that he once heard a sermon on the wonderful things done by Our Lady at Monte Senario on behalf of her Servants the Seven

¹ Prov. xv, 33.

Holy Founders, who had retired there and whose sons lived wholly dedicated to her service. So ardent was his desire to join this holy Community, that, resigning his bishopric into the hands of the Sovereign Pontiff, he at once sought admission into this new religious family.

His request was granted; and so, in the year 1425, on the very day on which the Church celebrated the birth of the King of glory into this world, Bishop Anthony resigned the episcopal dignity and exchanged his costly robes for the black habit of the Servants of her who, by the death of her only-begotten Son, gave men spiritual birth to the life of grace.

Anthony remained at Monte Senario for about ten years, fulfilling the humblest offices, as if he had been the last Religious of the Monastery. So humble was he, that he betrayed no shadow of his former dignity, and nothing distinguished him from the simple Religious, not only during his novitiate, but also when he was made Superior of the Community.

But such humility did not go unrewarded. Our Lady, who is not to be outdone in generosity, filled him with heavenly favors and deigned to appear to him, ordering him to go to the Bishop of Vicenza, that he might commit the care of the shrine of Monte Berico to the Religious of his Order. The Bishop of Vicenza willingly granted his petition.

Later, Anthony was chosen to found the Congregation of Servites of Mantua, of which he was three times elected Vicar General. In this office he never ceased to promote love for regular observance and devotion to the Queen of heaven. In this and many other ways did Our Lady's Servant, Anthony, give proof of his fidelity in the service of the Divine Mother, for whose sake he had renounced the dignity and the goods he had on earth.¹

PRAYER

O Mary, the virtue of humility was so excellent in thee, that thy body, like a true house of gold, was deemed worthy to become the habitation of the only-begotten Son of the God of glory. Obtain for me, I beseech thee, that I may despise with all my heart every worldly preferment, and may only sigh after the abjection of my Crucified Jesus. Amen.

¹ From the Annals of the Order of the Servants of Mary.

Ark of the Covenant

MARY OUR MEDIATRIX

"Hail glory of Virgins, mediatrix of men, bearer of our salvation!" (Adam of St. Victor.)

GOD, in governing the world, makes use of superior creatures to lead back those of an inferior order to Himself. In like manner, as regards the dispensation of divine grace, He has disposed that men, whom the sin of Adam had made His enemies, should be reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ, the most beautiful and most perfect of all the children of men.

Our blessed Lord is of a truth infinitely superior to all other men in his sacred manhood, on account of the hypostatic union and of the super-eminent sanctity He possesses. He is, then, the perfect Mediator between God and the human race, according to the words of St. Paul: "For there is one God and one Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."¹ Consequently, it is through Jesus Christ that our reconciliation with the Father was accomplished: "For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."²

¹ 1 TIM. II, 15.

² 2 COR. V, 19.

But the Lord, in His infinite bounty, chose to give us, besides this principal Mediator, other secondary mediators, whose office is to dispose us to receive the effects of the mediation of Jesus Christ. Thus are angels and saints, in some manner, secondary mediators for us with God: priests also, by coöperating with Our Saviour in perfecting our reconciliation with the Divine Majesty, become mediators for us, according to the words of St. Paul: "For Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us." ¹

* * *

The mediation of the Blessed Virgin is more excellent than that of any other creature whom God may have destined to coöperate with Jesus Christ in the work of our redemption. Mary is the rainbow, which St. John saw about the throne of God, like unto a most brilliant emerald.² If, then, the saints fulfill in our behalf the office of mediators with Jesus Christ, it is in some manner through Mary that they do so; and therefore Mary can be called truly our Mediatrix with the divine Redeemer.

Mary owes this dignity in the first place to the fact of her having been conceived without stain of original sin. By virtue of this stupendous miracle of the Most High, the human race

¹ *Ibid.* 20.

² APOC. IV, 3.

could be presented to God, in the person of the peerless Virgin, in that state of innocence and integrity which Adam possessed before his fall. We may therefore say that Mary's Immaculate Conception was as the dayspring of our reconciliation with God, a work which Jesus Christ was afterward to bring about by His death on the cross.

Furthermore, the answer which Mary gave to the heavenly messenger who asked for her consent with regard to the fulfillment of the Incarnation, marked the beginning of our redemption, in as much as it forestalled the near rise of the Son of Justice.

Finally, as the first condition to be fulfilled as preliminary to the accomplishment of our reconciliation with the Divine Majesty, is a firm and sincere faith in the truths of revelation, we may say that Mary is also our Mediatrix in this respect; for not only did she bring forth, through faith, the Author of our salvation, but furthermore she herself practiced this virtue with a constancy and perfection, which won for her the words of encomium: "Blessed art thou, that hast believed." ¹

* * *

It is through Mary that we find access to Our Saviour's grace. It is therefore a duty, on

¹ LUKE, I, 45.

our part, to manifest our gratitude to the Heavenly Father for having given us, in the mediation of the divine Mother, so efficacious a means of coming to Jesus. Ah, how truly may we say with St. Paul, that God wills the salvation of all men! ¹

A lesson follows upon the truth we are considering. We, too, in imitation of Mary, should seek to fulfill, each according to his power, the office of mediator between God and our fellow-men. We may do this, in the first place, by the holiness of our own lives, that our good example may encourage others to turn back to God. Secondly, we should avail ourselves of the means we have of implanting in the soul of our neighbor the seeds of eternal truth, and withdrawing sinners from the path of perdition.

EXAMPLE

ST. BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRÉ

St. Benedict Joseph Labré was born at Amettes, in France, on the twenty-sixth of March, 1748. At an early age he was moved by a heavenly inspiration to dedicate himself to God, and leaving his father's home he visited the more famous shrines of France and Italy. In following this kind of life, he would spare neither

¹ 1 TIM. II, 4.

hardship nor austerity, his purpose being to obtain from God, through penance, the conversion of sinners, and the help of divine assistance for the Church in her needs.

The goal of his wanderings was Rome, whither he went on foot, begging his bread by the way. When in the Eternal City, he embraced a life so humble and mortified, as entirely to astonish the world. He was content with one garment and his food was very scanty; he did not trouble about seeking shelter for the night, but usually slept in the open or on the steps of some church.

His great devotion to the glorious Mother of God was his principal support in this extraordinary manner of life. It was his custom to visit the most renowned shrines dedicated to this Holy Virgin which are venerated in the many churches of the Eternal City. He was wont to pass many hours in contemplation before the image of the Madonna dei Monti, which was especially dear to him. In his great devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows he went every morning to the Servite Church of San Marcello to assist at the recitation of the Rosary of Our Lady of Dolors and to assist at the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. He hoped in this way to obtain through the intercession of Our Lady a greater abundance of graces from her Son.

He never left Rome except to visit the most famous sanctuaries of Our Lady, especially that

of Loreto, whither he often went as a poor and simple pilgrim. When he got there, it was his custom to spend whole days within the Holy House, absorbed in profound prayer. He was so enraptured, as to feel no desire for food.

Many were the heavenly favors he received there from the Blessed Virgin. Having returned to Rome, he was one morning praying before his favorite shrine of the Madonna dei Monti, when he had a presentiment of his approaching death. He was then carried from the church into a neighboring house where, after a few days, he died the death of the just. This was on the sixteenth of April, 1783. He was canonized by Leo XIII, on the eighth of December, 1881.

PRAYER

O Mary, Ark of the New Testament, and our Mediatrix with Jesus Christ thy Son, we cast ourselves this day into thy maternal arms. Lead us back to Jesus and reconcile us with Him; and may the fruit of thy mediation be that we may treasure always with jealous care the gift of divine grace, so that we may never more be so unfortunate as to lose Jesus, our sole good and our last end. Amen.

Gate of Heaven

MARY HELP OF THE DYING

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death."
(Angelical Salutation.)

IF THERE is in a man's life one moment of supreme importance, that is without doubt the moment of death, for on this moment depends eternity. It would be of little avail for us to have passed a long life in the exercise of prayer and penance, or that we should have achieved a high degree of sanctity, if at the last we were to offend God even by one single mortal sin. We stand then especially in need of the divine assistance at that solemn moment, in order that our previous merits may be crowned with final perseverance. On the other hand, one act of sincere repentance at the hour of death, suffices to blot out all the sins of a lifetime and to merit for the sinner eternal happiness.

It is for this reason that our sworn enemy, who seeks only the loss of our souls, redoubles his efforts at that critical moment, to cause us to fall into sin. The infernal device he then makes use of, is to set before our eyes the

heinousness of the sins he may have induced us to commit during life, and so to cast us into despair and cause our ruin.

Blessed, then, be the infinite goodness of God, who has reserved for us, for the hour of death, the powerful succor of the Church's sacraments, and the maternal protection of Mary.

* * *

The Blessed Virgin, by assisting us in the hour of our death, helps us on to overcome the enemy of our salvation and to persevere to the end in the friendship of God. The zeal she puts forth in saving us from eternal ruin, makes her indeed be for us a heavenly Gate, *Janua Cæli*.

Now, in what way does the Mother of God assist us in this solemn moment? In the first place, by interceding for us with her Son, that He may grant us the priceless gift of final perseverance, as the holy Council of Trent styles it.¹ Mary's intercession at the moment of death is peculiarly efficacious, because she can easily obtain of God the salvation of the dying for whom she intercedes, having assisted at her Son's agony with an unequalled faith and charity.

Mary also helps us, at that moment, by the power she exercises over the infernal spirits, putting to flight the demons who would molest

¹ SESS. XI, CAN. XVI.

us on our deathbed, and inspiring us with holy thoughts and chaste desires; nay, at times, she extends her bounty so far as to appear visibly to her servants in their last moments.

O my soul, do not forget to often invoke the patronage of Mary for thy last moments, saying to her with faith: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

* * *

Mary's aid at the hour of our death will be for us an earnest of salvation, all the surer in proportion as we have sought through life to conform ourselves to the model she has set us. A firm resolve to imitate, as long as we live, Mary's virtues, will assure for us, upon our death-bed, those dispositions which we would wish to have, when we come to stand before the judgment-seat of God.

And what are these dispositions? In the first place, a lively abhorrence of sin, not only mortal, but also venial; and secondly, a perfect conformity to God's holy will. Such, in truth, was Mary's life. Her soul was never sullied by the slightest fault, nor had she ever any desire but that of conforming herself to the will of God.

Let us, then, be equally careful to avoid the least fault in this life, and let us form the habit of making frequent acts of conformity to the

holy will of God. We may, then, be sure of Mary's protection at the hour of death, and we may confidently hope that the end of this uncertain and sorrow-laden life will be for us the commencement of an everlasting joy.

It would be a gross presumption to expect a happy death at the close of a life marked by a series of voluntary transgressions. To reckon on the extraordinary grace of ultimate conversion, without making use of the means of sanctification offered us by God, would be a rashness likely to be followed by the most fatal consequences.

O my soul, flee from sin as the one obstacle to grace, and endeavor to correspond with the Divine inspirations.

EXAMPLE

THE MIRACULOUS PICTURE OF OUR LADY OF THE WELL

Among the most ancient pictures of Our Lady which are venerated in Rome, must be mentioned that of Our Lady of the Well, painted on a stone tablet and preserved with great care in the church of Santa Maria in Via. The origin of the devotion in honor of this picture is extraordinary indeed.

On the night between the twenty-sixth and

twenty-seventh of September, 1256, the water of a well situated in a stable underneath the apartments of Cardinal Peter Capocci, suddenly rose so high as to completely flood the basement. This greatly disturbed and frightened the horses, which began to jump about and so awakened the grooms. These men went down at once with torches and were much astonished to find this extraordinary flood; but their wonder increased when they saw a picture of Our Lady floating on top of the water. Their astonishment knew no bounds when they perceived that this picture, which they were trying to grasp, always escaped their hands, as if moved by an inward impulse. In despair, they went to tell their master the Cardinal what had happened. The Prelate hastened down with all his Court. After a short prayer he easily obtained possession of the picture and carried it to his private oratory. The water meanwhile returned to its ordinary level.

After an official inquiry, Alexander IV, who at that time governed the Church, gave permission for a chapel to be built on that spot in honor of Our Lady. He also ordered that the picture should be carried in solemn procession, at which he himself and the clergy of Rome were to take part, and that the picture should be placed in the chapel.

The faithful soon began to experience the pro-

tection of Our Lady, and she never ceased to work many wonderful cures in favor of her devout children who would pray before this picture, or drink of the miraculous water. In course of time, this chapel was enlarged and by the Pope's order, became one of the Cardinals' titular churches. It was entrusted to the care of the Servite Fathers and in 1646, with great demonstration of reverence and honor, the wonderful picture was solemnly crowned by decree of the Vatican Chapter.¹

PRAYER

O Mary, by thy constancy at the foot of the cross, thou didst merit to become the help of the dying. Do not abandon me, I implore thee, in my last agony; and in order that I may then be worthy to experience thy maternal protection, grant me, in this life, always to cherish in my heart a profound hatred of sin, and to be perfectly conformed to the will of God. Amen.

¹ From the History of the Shrine.

Morning Star

BIRTH OF MARY

"The foundations thereof are in the holy mountains; the Lord loveth the gates of Sion above all the tabernacles of Jacob." (Ps. LXXXVI, 1, 2.)

WHEN the time fixed by God to enrich mankind with new graces of salvation had arrived, the Blessed Virgin Mary was given to the earth. The world was then all wrapt in the darkness of paganism: even the chosen people, ungrateful to God, and forgetful of the divine promises, maintained only certain external observances of the Law quite inadequate to give spiritual life. When, lo! like the dawn of day, the Immaculate Virgin appeared on earth to illumine it with a new light of faith and love. For Mary's birth announced the near approach of the Sun of Justice, who would scatter the shades of death, and show to man the path to heaven.

Mary, at the time of her birth was not only without spot, but she also possessed grace in a much superior degree to that which Adam and Eve received on the first moment of their formation in the earthly paradise. The grace of sanc-

tification wherewith Mary was then adorned, surpassed even the consummate grace of the highest Seraphim, because she was destined to conceive and bring forth Jesus Christ, the true Son of God.

We may even say of Mary, that she commenced her mortal life in a superior degree of sanctity to that attained by the highest saints at the end of their career: "Her foundations are on the holy mountains." ¹

* * *

It is quite a tenable opinion that Mary, in the first instant of her conception, received the use of reason, in order that, by a spontaneous movement of her will, she might turn toward God, and thus freely consent to the operation of grace in her soul. Consequently, Mary knew God from her first entry into this world: she could therefore offer herself at that moment entirely to the Divine Majesty, devoting herself heart and soul to the service of the Most High.

Jesus Christ, upon entering into this world, thus addressed His Eternal Father: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldest not: but a body Thou hast fitted to me: holocausts for sin did not please Thee. Then, said I, behold I come: in the head of the book it is written of Me, that I should do Thy will, O God." ²

¹ PS. LXXXVI, 1.

² HEB. X, 5, 7.

In like manner, Mary, before she yet knew of her election to the dignity of Mother of God, offered herself nevertheless without reserve to the Lord, that He should do with her whatever it pleased Him, and that He might deign to accept her as a victim of expiation for the sins of men. In such fashion did Mary trace the outlines of a life which was to be in perfect likeness to that of Jesus Christ, for the keynote of her whole existence was to be the resemblance with her divine Son.

Oh, how pleasing to God was this offering! With what complacency did the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity look down on this heavenly Child, who was one day to procure Them such glory!

Endeavor, O my soul, to imitate Mary in the oblation of thyself to God; frequently renew this offering, saying with the Royal Prophet: "My heart is ready, my God, my heart is ready."¹ "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God."²

* * *

The grace with which Mary was enriched from her entrance into this world, and the dowry of supernatural virtues with which she was then adorned, are a sufficient motive to liken her to a fair city, wherein the Three Divine Persons de-

¹ Ps. LVI, 8.

² *Ibid.* CXLII, 10.

lighted to dwell: "Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God." ¹ The Holy Ghost was well pleased with this dwelling place, far more than with the Temple of Jerusalem made with hands; hence He never ceased to replenish it with new and precious graces.

Grace went on increasing in Mary's soul from the first use of reason, to her last mortal action. Corresponding incessantly to the motion of the Holy Spirit with all her might, she doubled and even trebled over and over again the grace that was in her. How, then, can we possibly apprise the sum of her accumulated spiritual wealth, when the time arrived that her divine Spouse was pleased to call her to Himself?

EXAMPLE

BLESSED JOACHIM PICCOLOMINI

Blessed Joachim Piccolomini, a shining light of the Servite Order, was born in Siena of a noble family. From his earliest years he nourished a tender devotion to our blessed Lady, and it was his great delight to recite the Hail Mary. When he was thirteen years old he was called by Our Lady herself to the religious life. In consequence, leaving his father's home, he begged to be admitted to the Order of the Servants of Mary,

¹ *Ibid.* LXXXVI, 8.

and was received and clothed by St. Philip Benizi.

By the special protection of Our Lady he kept himself immune from any grievous sin and he especially avoided anything contrary to holy purity. He made it a point to exercise himself in penance and mortification; but the virtue which particularly shone in him was his ardent charity toward his neighbor, and in this he gave to all a striking example. One day he met an epileptic whom he did his best to console, but the sufferer would not listen to his kind words, but rather rebuked Joachim, saying: "You had better take this illness upon yourself and I will console you."

The holy man hearing this at once went on his knees before the crucifix and begged Our Lord to transfer the affliction of the unhappy man to himself. At that instant the sick man was perfectly healed and Joachim contracted the terrible disease which he bore patiently till his death.

But this suffering did not satisfy his charity and he continually prayed that he might become more and more like his Crucified Lord. His desire was fulfilled, for his whole body began to be covered with sores which ate away his flesh to the bone. He bore all this with great joy and patience and in spite of the entreaties of his brethren he did not ask to be delivered by a miraculous cure.

Toward the end of his life he was honored by Our Lady with a vision in which she showed him two crowns prepared for him in heaven: one for his voluntary martyrdom, the other for his great virtues. He begged for the grace of dying on Good Friday and his prayer was heard. For when his brethren were gathered round him on that day and the Passion was being read in the Church, at these words: "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit," he peacefully expired. This was the sixteenth of April, 1305. Our Lord was pleased to glorify his servant by many miracles, which were and are still obtained through his intercession.

PRAYER

O Mary, radiant star, whose shining announced the near advent of Christ, the King of Justice, grant me, I pray thee, always to correspond with divine grace, and never to place any obstacle to the action of God in my soul. Amen.

Health of the Sick

MARY THE HEALTH OF THE SICK

"And I perfumed my dwelling as storax, and galbanum, and onyx and aloes, and as the frankincense not cut, and my odor is as the purest balsam."
(ECCLUS. XXIV, 21.)

THE sin of our first parents not only deprived man of original justice and of all the gifts consequent thereon; it reduced him furthermore to a state of great weakness, so that it is impossible for us to accomplish works of supernatural value, without a special grace. Fallen man is like one sick, who has no relish for any nourishment whatever. He is deficient in vital energy, and his actions are wanting in that vigor which naturally belongs to a healthy person. He is strongly inclined to vice, and finds the practice of virtue tedious and difficult.

This natural incapacity regarding the performance of good works is further increased by actual sin, whether mortal or venial. The former, by depriving the soul of divine grace, which is the principle of spiritual life, hinders man from doing anything pleasing to God, so as to merit eternal happiness. The latter, by

diminishing the fervor of charity, makes the practice of virtue laborious, since charity has for its effect precisely to facilitate the performance of what is good. Sin is therefore a great evil, because, if mortal, it saps altogether the spiritual energy of the soul, and if venial, it notably weakens it.

If from individuals we pass on to nations, we perceive that sin, like a subtle poison, eats into the heart of them, weakening and preparing their ruin.

* * *

Divine bounty, which for bodily ailments, has procured us efficacious remedies, is not less industrious in providing the means to heal our spiritual maladies. With the sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ to restore our souls to grace or to augment it within us, God has also been pleased to grant us, in Mary's aid, a potent remedy for our spiritual infirmities. In fact, Mary has not only given us Jesus Christ, the Pastor and Physician of our souls, but furthermore, she watches over us as a tender mother does by the cradle of an ailing child.

Besides this, Mary's example encourages us in our conflict with the devil. For she is the Immaculate Virgin, who never was defiled by sin. Her sweet soul was always filled with the perfume of the noblest virtues.

Mary never ceases also to hearken to the voice of our supplications and to present them before the throne of God, often anticipating our requests, and obtaining for us, through her own merits and those of Jesus Christ, all the helps necessary to us in our spiritual needs.

And what Mary does for individuals, she also does for whole nations. As a pitiful Queen, she succors them in their distress; she raises them from their bed of sickness, and is for them a bulwark of defense.¹

* * *

Mary's power and motherly care not only embrace spiritual miseries: they also extend to the ills of the body. How often do we see Mary restoring health to the sick, who have recourse to her with filial confidence!

In Mary's readiness to alleviate bodily ailments, shines forth most splendidly God's love for her. It seems as if the Most High had placed no limit to the efficacy of His Mother's intercession. While other saints are invoked only in particular cases of corporal infirmity, Mary's power, on the other hand, is exercised over every kind of malady. Hence we may say that, at her word, as once at the word of Jesus, the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear.² The sole differ-

¹ CANT. VIII, 10.

² MATT. XI, 5.

ence is that Jesus Christ, being God, wrought these miracles of his own personal authority, while Mary obtains for us, of the Divine Clemency, the graces she asks, by virtue of the efficacy of her intercession with God.

However, though Mary is so powerful in healing all bodily ailments, yet she does not always deliver her clients from every such trial, because God sees best to exercise them in patience, that they may thereby win the reward prepared for them in heaven. But when Mary does not restore bodily health, yet, for all that, she never ceases to act the part of a tender Mother toward us, watching over us, and obtaining for us, in place of bodily strength, resignation to the divine will and interior peace: two sovereign means of sanctification and salvation.

EXAMPLE

THE RECOVERY OF POPE INNOCENT VIII

Among the wonderful pictures through which God has been pleased to show Mary's power in helping the poor children of Adam, must be mentioned that of the Santissima Annunziata at Florence. The marvelous cures and other graces obtained through Our Lady's intercession by means of this picture are numerous enough to fill many volumes. One of the most miracu-

lous and worthy of special mention is the cure of his Holiness Pope Innocent VIII.

This Pope had been lying ill for a long time in great agony and the doctors could not in any way appease his sufferings. Already he had given up all hope and was awaiting death from hour to hour, when there came to visit him the Cardinal Protector of the Servite Order, John Micheli, who began to narrate to him the marvelous favors granted by the Santissima Annunziata at Florence to her devout servants. The Cardinal then encouraged the Pope to trust in Mary, who is truly called the "health of the sick" and to ask her to deliver him from his painful malady. When Innocent heard this, the hope of recovery revived in him and he felt in his heart a lively trust in the protection of our blessed Lady. He vowed to dedicate himself especially to her service, if she should be pleased to free him from his grievous sufferings.

How great was the amazement of the doctors and the joy of Rome when, after a short time, Innocent was found to be perfectly cured. Full of gratitude for this unexpected deliverance he ordered a skilled artist to depict the tragic scene of his mortal illness and he sent this painting to Florence in testimony of the grace granted to him. Moreover, the Pontiff, as a token of his special devotion to this miraculous picture, extended to all the principal churches of the Ser-

vite Order the privilege of celebrating with great solemnity a Mass in honor of the Mother of God on the afternoon of Holy Saturday. He also granted to these Religious the celebrated Bull, known as *Mare Magnum*, by which all the privileges granted previously to the other Mendicant Orders were extended to the Order of the Servants of Mary.¹

PRAYER

O Mary, Immaculate Virgin, our salvation lies in thy hands. Cleanse our souls, we beseech thee, from the leprosy of sin, and assist us in our corporal infirmities. And if it be the will of God that we must be acquainted with sickness and suffering, obtain for us, at least, perfect patience and resignation in whatsoever God may dispose. Amen.

¹ From the Annals of the Order of the Servants of Mary.

Refuge of Sinners

MARY REFUGE OF SINNERS

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me; . . . and blessed be thou, who hast kept me to-day from coming to blood."

(1 KINGS, XXV, 32, 33.)

THE worst evil that can befall us is unquestionably sin. This is of a truth our soul's enemy, which by sullyng its purity, renders it an object of abhorrence in the sight of God, who is essential Holiness. Furthermore, sin deprives our soul of all share in the spiritual life, and subjects it, in a certain degree, to the dominion of the spirit of darkness.

At the beginning, Adam, by his transgression, infected the human race with sin. In consequence of this original sin, we are all born children of wrath, and though we are regenerated by holy Baptism, alas! we oftentimes leave the path of justice and truth, and follow our unruly passions or give ear to the promptings of self-love. How often do we rebel against God, our Heavenly Father! Ah, how priceless and beneficial is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shed all this most precious blood to redeem us from

sin! "The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us from all sin."¹

* * *

God's infinite mercy has not only prepared for us a potent remedy against sin in the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour, but it has also given us, poor sinners, a secure refuge in the assistance of the Blessed Virgin.

We read that there were, in the Old Law, cities of refuge, to which the guilty, whose crimes had rendered them worthy of death, could flee for safety. In the New Law, the mantle of the Mother of God is like a citadel, wherein sinful souls may find refuge. How can the divine wrath strike us, if we are covered by the mantle of Mary, the chosen daughter and the honored Mother of God?

Mary, by taking us under her protection, is not merely a pledge of our safety, but moreover, by her unrivaled sanctity, she is an earnest of pardon to all sinners who have recourse to her intercession. Not only does the Immaculate Virgin, by the fervor of her supplications, disarm God's just anger roused by our sins, but also she obtains for her true clients sincere and heartfelt conversion. It is enough that we should turn toward her with faith, in order that we may obtain, through her, of the Divine Clem-

¹ JOHN, I, 7.

ency, the means to rise from the mire of sin.

I thank thee, O my God, for having granted me in the protection of Thy Mother, an assured refuge, where I may be sheltered from the severity of Thy justice. May I never neglect to have recourse to a Benefactress so powerful and so full of pity!

* * *

To be cleansed from sin and to be admitted once again into friendship with God is a grace beyond compare: but to be kept free from fresh falls is even more important, as our salvation depends entirely upon final perseverance. Mary, by her intercession, obtains for us not only to detest past faults, but also to escape renewed lapses, and herein again her assistance is of the utmost value.

It was the privilege of the Mother of God to be exempt from all sin, original as well as actual; and so the principal grace she accords to her faithful servants is to preserve them from sin. Like a most tender and loving mother, she protects her clients against the fierce onslaughts of the enemy, supporting and guiding them through the thorny pathways of life, and keeping them away from all stumbling-blocks. And since, through God's permission, we are tempted in all sorts of ways, Mary's watchful assistance helps us to put Satan to flight, while she suggests to us,

through our angel guardian, all manner of chaste thoughts and holy aspirations.

But it is more especially at the hour of death, that the Holy Mother shelters her faithful servants, driving the Tempter far from them, and encouraging them to fight valiantly to the last gasp.

Happy he who frequently has recourse to Mary with faith and devotion! Despite his weakness, despite his many failures, he may surely hope for salvation, for Mary "is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her, and he that shall retain her is blessed." ¹

EXAMPLE

ST. MARY OF EGYPT

The mercy of the Mother of God for poor sinners is shown in a particular manner in the life of St. Mary of Egypt, who under the protection of our blessed Lady withdrew from the path of sin to walk in that of virtue, and finally attained to the highest degree of Christian perfection.

This woman, from her early years was an instrument of ruin to many souls. One day, on hearing that a pious pilgrimage was going to Jerusalem, she wished to join the company.

But the mercy of the Mother of God was

¹ PROV. III, 18.

awaiting her precisely where she thought of offending God. The party soon reached the Holy City, and, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross repaired to the church where the relic of the Holy Cross was preserved. Mary wished to join the people but, on reaching the threshold, she found herself as it were held back by an invisible force. She tried again and again to enter, but each time the same mysterious force held her back. At last, enlightened from on High, she understood that God had commanded His angels to keep her out of the church in punishment for her sins.

Then, full of compunction, she threw herself on her knees in front of a picture of Our Lady which was in the peristyle of the church and with great fervor and sorrow she cried out; "I am not worthy, O most chaste Virgin, that thou shouldst deign to look upon me, but I have heard that thy Son came into this world to recall sinners to repentance. Come to mine aid therefore, and obtain for me that I may see and adore that precious cross on which my Saviour has shed His blood for my redemption; and I promise on my part to renounce the path of sin."

Hardly had she uttered this humble prayer, than the mysterious force which forbade her entering the church was removed, and she adored the cross with feelings of lively compunction. Then, coming out of the church, she prostrated

herself once more before the picture of Our Lady to seek her counsel, and heard in reply that she should retire to the neighborhood of the Jordan, where she would find her place of rest. She at once resolved to obey the inspiration. After a general confession of her sins she retired into the desert, where she abode for forty-seven years, leading a life of the strictest penance, without seeing any living soul.

PRAYER

O Mary, Mother of God, see me prostrate at thy feet, a poor sinner guilty, alas! of many transgressions, and moreover surrounded with daily occasions of sin. I have, therefore, recourse to thee, with all the fervor of my soul, and I pray thee to cast thy mantle over me, to drive away the evil one, and to bring me, through all the dangers of this life, on to the harbor of eternal safety. Amen.

Comforter of the Afflicted

MARY THE CONSOLER OF THE AFFLICTED

"Holy Mary, succor the wretched, encourage the faint-hearted, cheer the mournful."

(Antiphon of the "Magnificat" in the First Vespers of the Office of Our Lady.)

AFFLICTION, the inseparable associate of man during his earthly pilgrimage, is the natural consequence of the ills that befall us, either from within or from without. Bereavement, loss of fortune, calumny, malpractices designed against us, are so many causes of exterior affliction. Sickness, temptation, trouble, and, above all, the thought of having offended God by sin, and the danger we run of offending Him again—these and such like things give rise in us to interior sufferings.

Earthly goods are all insufficient to console us in the midst of so many evils. They may assuage our bitterness in part, but when all is said and done, they leave nought but an aching in our hearts, and are powerless to fortify us against fresh miseries.

As an offset against the ills of life, the infinite goodness of God has prepared for us, in the

ever-present aid of the most Holy Virgin, a copious source of consolation, for which indeed we ought to be grateful. It is enough to have recourse to this Mother of mercy, to be assured of receiving from her a prompt relief in the pains of life, a balm for the wounded heart, a comfort in the woes and calamities which overwhelm us.

Just as Jesus Christ invited us to seek our consolation in Him, when He said: "Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you,"¹ thus also Mary holds out to us, in the midst of the sorrows of this life, the most soothing comfort: "Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits."²

* * *

Mary's power to comfort the wretched arises mainly from this, that she above all others has known sorrow. As the inseparable companion of Jesus, during the thirty-three years of His mortal life, Mary partook of all His sufferings. With Him she felt the pinch of poverty, experiencing all manner of privations. The reproaches of them that reproached Jesus fell also upon her;³ and when the disciples forsook their Divine Master one by one, Mary followed Him

¹ MATT. XI, 28.

² ECDUS. XXIV, 26.

³ PS. LXVIII, 10.

faithfully even to Calvary, there to drink with Him to the dregs His bitter chalice. Even after the Saviour had ended His mortal life of labor and toil, Mary continued to live on and suffer, until it pleased God to call her to Himself.

Mary's faith and constancy joined with her inviolable attachment to the teachings of her Son are in themselves a source of consolation to us. For, this divine Mother teaches us, by her example, never to despair of divine assistance. She animates us to persevere in our good undertakings, whatever difficulties may oppose us. By obtaining for us, through her mediation, a large share in the virtue of the cross, she changes our sorrows into liveliest joys, as formerly the wood pointed out by God to Moses changed the bitter waters of the desert into sweet.¹

* * *

If we have recourse to Mary in time of affliction, not only shall we receive from her consolation in our pains, but we shall also learn by her example to value at their proper worth the crosses wherewith Our Lord is pleased to visit us.

The time of suffering is by far the most precious time of this life; for it is then that the opportunity comes of practicing the highest virtues.

¹ EXOD. XV, 25.

These virtues are: faith in the wise ordering of Divine Providence, trust in the assistance of Heaven, and charity, both toward God, who allows us to be afflicted, and toward our neighbor, who may perhaps be the cause of our sufferings. The time of afflictions is then most precious, though we, alas! oftentimes value it at so low a rate. "If thou hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace."¹

Beware, O my soul, of ever murmuring or losing patience. Bear all things with peace and joy, in company with Jesus Crucified and His sorrowing Mother. Recall to mind these comforting words of Our Saviour: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."²

EXAMPLE

BLESSED BIONDA FOSCHI

Blessed Bionda Foschi, the owner of the ancient castle of Verrucchio, was a noble and pious gentlewoman adorned with the most precious gifts of mind and heart, and revered and loved not only by her dependents, but also by all with whom she came into contact.

Having been, while still young, given in matrimony to Count Foschi, she soon had the misfortune to lose him and this loss was followed by

¹ LUKE, XIX, 42.

² MATT. V, 15.

another, for the whole family were thrown into poverty and indigence by a rival faction. One consolation, however, yet remained to Bionda in the person of her little son, whom she loved dearly. She instructed him with great care in piety and the fear of God.

It happened that her enemies, not satisfied with the vengeance they had wrought on the rest of the family, directed their hatred against this innocent child, whom they finally put to death.

What were the anguish and desolation of Bionda to find herself so barbarously treated after so many misfortunes! But what was she now to do? Was she to give way to despair, or take vengeance on her enemies? She did neither. She turned her eyes to Our Lady of Sorrows, to whom she had always shown a tender devotion. By contemplating Mary standing at the foot of the cross and assisting sorrowfully at the death of her Divine Son, Bionda found consolation in her grief. She felt within her soul the calm of heavenly peace and her heart breathed forth a generous pardon for her enemies. Conquering the feelings of nature, she forgave her foes and this pardon proved dearer to her heart than any vengeance.

This heroic sacrifice on the part of Bionda was most pleasing to God who searches the hearts of men. He gave her in return to realize the

nothingness of this world, and deigned to call her to a life of perfection among the Servants of His most Holy Mother. In her new state, Bionda devoted herself entirely to the way of perfection and, with the help of divine grace, she attained to so great a degree of sanctity as to merit to work many miracles during her life and also after her death. She was ever invoked as Blessed by the voice of the people.¹

PRAYER

O most Holy Virgin, who art fitly called the Consoler of the Afflicted, obtain for me of Jesus Christ thy Son, the grace never to lose heart in the day of trouble, and to seek no comfort but in Jesus and thyself. Grant that I may ever have confidence in thy maternal heart pierced with the sword of sorrow, and that I may find therein my true and only consolation. Amen.

¹ From the Annals of the Order of the Servants of Mary.

Help of Christians

MARY'S POWER OF INTERCESSION

"We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities."
(Antiphon at Compline in the Little Office of Our Lady.)

NO ARTICLE of the Creed is so consoling as that wherein we profess our faith in the Communion of Saints. Thereby we believe that the members of the Church Militant here on earth are united by the ties of holy affection to the members of the Church Suffering in purgatory, and to those of the Church Triumphant in heaven. The first come to the aid of the second by their prayers, and are themselves succored and sustained by the third in their warfare against the enemies of salvation.

We can, therefore, come to the aid of the souls in purgatory by our suffrages. On their part, the saints who are already in possession of eternal happiness, can assist us by the prayers which they offer for us before the throne of God. They are not unconscious of our warfare: they know by their own experience what encounters we must stand: they see in the light of the Di-

vine Essence the prayers with which we invoke them, and the charity with which they are animated impels them to intercede earnestly for us.

The saints do not merely pray for us in a sort of general way; but they also ask of God those particular graces of which we stand in need, especially when we invoke them with faith and perseverance.

Rejoice, O my soul, that thou hast such powerful protectors in heaven, whose intercession, based on the merits of Jesus Christ, is for thee a sovereign remedy against the troubles of life.

* * *

Of all our heavenly patrons, the most Holy Virgin is beyond comparison the most powerful, wherefore we call her our Advocate before the throne of God. The dignity of Mother of God with which she is invested, the ardent charity which fills her soul, her office of Mother toward us, cause her to obtain for us, by her intercession, more graces than all the angels and saints put together can do, so that her requests are always granted.

The blessings which Mary obtains for us by her prayers extend to our temporal as well as to our spiritual needs, although she only obtains for us temporal goods on account of some useful relation which these may have to the spiritual life. The supernatural science which she draws

from the vision of God face to face, leads her to discern what is profitable for us from what might turn to our disadvantage. For, seeing all things in the Divine Essence, she cannot err like ourselves, who often judge that to be useful, which in reality is pernicious to our soul's welfare.

It is to be observed, moreover, that Mary does not only intercede for those who have recourse to her: indeed, she often prays for those who do not call upon her, so that there are none who do not feel in one way or another the benefits of her intercession. Nor is the power of her mediation limited to one set of graces alone: on the contrary, it covers every kind of need. Not even the souls in purgatory are excluded from its efficacy: for our departed brethren frequently owe their deliverance to the prayers of this divine Mother.

* * *

One of the surest tokens of God's goodness to us, is His having given us Mary, in whom after Jesus we repose all our hope. And it is precisely on account of the efficacy of Mary's intercession, that devotion to her has always been considered a mark of predestination. Just as by relying on a trusty pilot we may voyage in safety, so also we are sure of our salvation under the guidance of so powerful a Queen.

For all that, let us guard against that false

devotion, which rashly counting on Mary's intercession, might make us negligent of the practice of good works, or worse still, embolden us to sin with greater impunity. This, in fact, would be nothing short of presumption. Rather, let us be always solicitous that our devotion be united with a sincere desire to please God and avoid sin. Then, indeed, we shall be able to say with truth that devotion to Mary has been for us the source of every blessing.

To this wholesome devotion we may apply the words of Wisdom: "Now all good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands."¹

EXAMPLE

OUR LADY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

This invocation in the Litany of Loreto and the feast which the Church celebrates under this title, take their rise from certain events which prove how great is the care and solicitude of the Mother of God in protecting the Church of Christ against its most bitter enemies.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the power of the Turks had become so great as to threaten the peace of all Europe. St. Pius V, at that time the reigning Pontiff, was famous

¹ WISD. VII, 11.

not only for his Christian fortitude, but also for his holy life. He caused the combined forces of Christendom to turn against the common enemy. This great army was indeed inferior in number to that of the Turks, but it was confident of victory, for it had placed its trust in the assistance of our blessed Lady.

The enemy were soon routed. The Sovereign Pontiff was at that time kneeling before a picture of our blessed Lady and was absorbed in prayer when, suddenly Mary appeared to him and told him that in that very hour the enemy had been defeated. St. Pius recognized in this the powerful aid of Mary and ordained that the invocation "Help of Christians" should henceforth be added to the Litany of Loreto.

Some years later, that is, under Napoleon I, the Church of Christ was once more in the throes of a terrible crisis. This ambitious Emperor for more than five years, confined the Sovereign Pontiff Pius VII in prison, to the great sorrow of all true sons of the Church. When all hope for the liberty of the Vicar of Christ seemed lost, Our Lady once more came to the aid of her faithful children. In fact, the Emperor was constrained to abdicate and the Pope returned to Rome to exercise the duties of his office in his own episcopal city. Once more he was forced to abandon Rome and his faithful people but,

contrary to the expectation of all, he again returned to his beloved sons.

The world may perhaps have seen, in these happenings, only a political change, but the eyes of the Sovereign Pontiff could not fail to detect therein the hand of Mary, whom he had invoked so fervently. Pius VII, in thanksgiving for his deliverance, wished to crown with his own hands the picture of Our Lady venerated at Savona, where he was first imprisoned; and moreover ordained that the twenty-fourth of May should be kept every year as a special feast day in her honor, under the title of "Help of Christians."

PRAYER

O Mary, sovereign Mistress of heaven and earth, not only are the elements obedient to thy word, but the Creator of the universe has Himself willed to be subject to thee. Obtain for me of thy Son, I beseech thee, the grace to have recourse to thee with a firm confidence, in all my necessities and troubles, now and above all at the hour of my death. Amen.

Queen of Angels

GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING IN MARY

"For she is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness." (WISD. VII, 26.)

AS WE come to the knowledge of natural truth by the intellectual power of our soul, so the Holy Ghost imparts to us, by the gift of understanding, a kind of comprehension and penetration, though imperfect, of the mysteries of the supernatural life. This gift differs from the virtue of faith. By faith we firmly adhere to the truths of revelation, without comprehending them; the gift of understanding, on the other hand, imparts to us a kind of intellectual comprehension of these same truths, as far as our present condition will permit.

It does not belong to the gift of understanding to enlighten us as to those truths which do not concern our salvation. God in His wisdom sometimes keeps these things hidden from us, to preserve our souls in humility. But as regards the truths of our holy Faith, the gift of understanding gives us a sort of intuition, whereby the mysteries of the kingdom of God appear to us in all

their beauty. It partially raises the veil which envelops the Inspired Writings, opening up to us an insight into the sublime truths of revelation. It is thus that Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, gave to His apostles the intelligence of the Sacred Scriptures: "Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures."¹

Let us praise and thank the Spirit of God for deigning to become our soul's instructor, granting us an intelligence of those truths which have reference to the life of the soul, as it is written: "They shall all be taught of God."²

* * *

The Holy Spirit having been pleased to choose Mary for His well-beloved Spouse, He also adorned her with the precious gift of understanding, in order that, enlightened as she was by faith touching the mysteries of the spiritual life, she might further receive an ever-increasing illumination. Thus did He introduce her more and more into the knowledge of supernatural truths, and especially into the mystery of the Incarnation, wherein she herself was to play so conspicuous a part.

That extraordinary light broke in more wonderfully on Mary's soul, at the moment when, having given her consent to the accomplishment

¹ LUKE, XXIV, 45.

² JOHN, VI, 45.

of this mystery, she merited to conceive in her womb the Word of God. She then clearly saw the vastness of the divine plan and the final end of the Incarnation, as we gather from the noble and exalted words with which she replied to the salutation of her cousin Elizabeth.

Later on, when the day of the Presentation in the Temple arrived, and the holy old man Simeon, taking in his arms the Divine Child, announced to Mary that a sword of sorrow would pierce her own immaculate heart, the Mother of God comprehended, in one glance, as far as a creature could do so, the whole scheme of the Redemption. She thoroughly realized that if Jesus was to be the butt of contradiction, she too must suffer with Him for the ransom of the human race, and must drain with Him the cup of bitterness. From that time forward, Mary had no other sentiment but the sentiment of Jesus Christ Himself, according to the words of St. Paul ¹: "But we have a sense of Christ."

* * *

If we come to consider the abyss of imprudence and thoughtlessness into which they fall who are deprived of faith and have no guide but the spirit of darkness, we shall easily perceive how necessary the gift of understanding is for the individual as well as for society at large. In fact,

¹ 1 COR. II, 16.

what are the wicked about, unless it be to rush headlong to ruin? "They are a nation without counsel, and without wisdom. Oh, that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end!"¹

Unfortunately, how many Christians do we see nowadays, in whom the gift of understanding is lacking, if not in substance, at least, as regards its effects! They possess but a confused, barren and indifferent apprehension of revealed truth. Their faith is so weak, that the flimsiest sophisms, woven by the spirit of falsehood, are enough to shake and sometimes to overturn their belief. Consequently, these nominal Christians see nothing in the opprobrium of the cross but shame and folly, and the persecutions to which the Church is subjected are to them a stumbling-block.

EXAMPLE

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

St. Thomas Aquinas, justly called the Angel of the Schools or the Angelic Doctor, gave great promise from his earliest years of a remarkable devotion toward our blessed Lady. He was still being carried in the arms of his nurse, when one day, holding in his hand a card on which was written the Angelical Salutation, he clasped it

¹ DEUT. XXXII, 28, 29.

lovingly to his breast. When his mother took it from him by force, Thomas would not keep quiet until it was restored to him, and then placing it in his mouth he swallowed it. Such were the tokens of his future devotion to our blessed Lady, which indeed was to become, as it were, a burning fire in the heart of the Saint.

While still a youth, he was received into the Order of the Friars Preachers. But his worldly brothers, dissatisfied with his decision, immediately began to persecute him, trying by every means in their power to withdraw him from his holy purpose. They confined him in a tower and strove to make him fall into grievous sin. They felt that thus Thomas would quickly lose his religious vocation. But the Saintly youth exclaimed: "My Jesus and thou, most holy Virgin, Mother of my Saviour, permit me not to be a prey to sin." And thus he obtained, through the intercession of Mary, a singular victory over the world and its concupiscence. He then cast himself on his knees and with tears in his eyes gave thanks to God, who had helped him to triumph over his enemies. While he was praying, he was rapt in ecstasy, and beheld an angel descending from heaven and placing a girdle about his loins.

Throughout his whole life Thomas was no longer subject to any motion of concupiscence. He could raise his mind unhampered to the con-

templation of heavenly things. Moreover, he acquired a knowledge of theology which he possessed in an eminent degree and which merited for him the title of "Doctor of the Church." And for all this he was greatly indebted to his devotion to our blessed Lady.

PRAYER

O Mary, whose intellect was enlightened by the Holy Spirit to comprehend more clearly than the angels the mysteries of the kingdom of God, obtain for me, I beseech thee, from the same Spirit, an increase of the gift of understanding, and grant that not only my reason may be illumined to understand supernatural truths, but also that my heart may be ready to accomplish in all things the will of thy Son. Amen.

Queen of Patriarchs

GIFT OF PIETY IN MARY

*"Instead of thy fathers, sons are born to thee;
thou shalt make them princes over all the earth."*

(Ps. XLIV, 17.)

BY THE gift of piety, the Holy Ghost inspires us to love God as our Father, to whom we pay that respect, honor and worship, which a dutiful son renders to the author of his days, according to the words of St. Paul: "You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba (Father)." ¹

The gift of piety acts upon our hearts as fire upon wax. It softens them, so that they become capable of receiving the impressions of God's fatherly love; it fills them with tender affection, mingled with profound reverence for all that appertains to the divine worship. Under the influence of this impression, we can say with St. John: "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God." ²

¹ 1 JOHN, III, 1.

² ROM. VIII, 15.

This spirit prompts us to open our hearts to God, in all confidence and simplicity, to hold sweet converse with Him, characterized by the most ardent love and perfect freedom.

That filial and reverential love, which the gift of piety engenders in our hearts, includes, after God, all those who are more intimately united with Him: angels, saints, priests, and so forth. The word of God also, contained in Holy Writ, becomes through the gift of piety an object of peculiar love and respect.

O Lord, enrich my soul with this precious gift, for none is so much a father as Thou art, nor is any one so tender and compassionate: *Tam pater nemo, tam pius nemo.*¹

* * *

Were it given us to contemplate the soul of Mary, we should be carried away with admiration for the sentiments of divine love where-with the gift of piety had inspired her, a spectacle fit to replenish us with holy joy. What sweetness of intercourse with the Spouse of her soul! What confidence in her abandonment to God's providence amid her sorrows! What generosity in her transports of love! What loftiness of aspiration! What conformity to the divine will in the trials of life! What ardor and singleness of purpose in her quest for her Master's

¹ TERTULL, *De Poenit.*, c. VIII.

glory! What bitter grief at the sight of the outrages heaped upon her Well-Beloved!

It was this same gift of piety which prompted her to devote her energies to the service of the Temple, esteeming this above all the most splendid palaces of kings. It was likewise this gift which inspired her with a holy veneration for the Sacred Scriptures, and above all for the oral utterances of her Son Jesus Christ, for we read that she "kept all these words in her heart."¹ She entertained also for her guardian angel an especial love and reverence. In fine, although she saw the apostles so inferior to herself in grace and virtue, nevertheless she esteemed them as the ministers of her Son, and loved them with a true mother's love.

* * *

The gift of piety not only makes us love and venerate God as our Father and exhibit the highest reverence for whatsoever is consecrated to Him, it moves us furthermore to minister to the needs of those whom we know to be corporally or spiritually destitute.

The corporal works of mercy are seven in number: to feed the hungry and to give drink to the thirsty; to harbor the harborless; to clothe the naked; to visit the sick: to comfort prisoners; to redeem captives; to bury the dead.—The

¹ LUKE, II, 51.

spiritual works of mercy are also seven: to instruct the ignorant; to admonish sinners; to counsel the doubting; to console the afflicted; to bear injuries patiently; to forgive offenses; to pray for the living and the dead.

It were hard to tell the perfection with which Mary practiced these different works of mercy. One thing, however, is certain, that the vice of envy, which is opposed to the gift of piety, never entered into her immaculate heart.

EXAMPLE

BLESSED MATTHEW OF CITTA DELLÀ PIEVE

Blessed Matthew Lazzari was born in Città della Pieve, in Umbria, toward the end of the thirteenth century. While yet a boy, he resolved to dedicate himself entirely to God, in one of the Religious Orders approved by the Church, in order to render himself more pleasing to the Divine Majesty. Among the different Orders which presented themselves, he chose that of the Servants of Mary, on account of the special devotion which he bore to the Mother of God desiring thus to consecrate himself entirely to her service.

He therefore sought to be admitted into this Order, which possessed a monastery in his native town. He was admitted among the students, and

as he was found to possess extraordinary mental ability, he was sent to the celebrated university of Paris to learn the human and divine sciences.

So much did he apply himself to study, that he gained the degree of Doctor of Divinity and returned to his native country with the aureola of theological knowledge, to which was added that of a special sanctity. On this account he was entrusted by his Order with many important offices, all of which he fulfilled to universal satisfaction, until in 1344, the Sovereign Pontiff, Clement VI, placed him at the head of his Order, which he governed till his death.

He was very devout to Our Lady and loved to venerate her in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. He was most ardent in the defense of this truth. By his preaching and conversation, he used to propose this beautiful devotion to the faithful. In public disputes he always sided with those who held the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. In his position as Superior General of the Order, he found a means of inducing a great number of people to share in these pious sentiments of devotion to Mary, not neglecting to bring them into his public acts and invoking her powerful patronage for the benefit of his own religious brethren. Moreover, he was accustomed to use the following invocation when imparting to them his blessing: "May the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin

Mary be your safeguard and protection.”

Full of years and merits, he was summoned to the joys of Heaven in the year of Our Lord 1348. Immediately after his death he was invoked by the people as “Blessed” although his cult has not yet been recognized by the Church.¹

PRAYER

O Mary, whose piety was far more perfect than that of the patriarchs, and whose maternal bosom is open to all, obtain for me, I beseech thee, always to have such love and reverence for God, my Heavenly Father, that I may never cease to labor for His honor and glory, and that I may endeavor also to alleviate, as far as lies in me, the woes and afflictions of my neighbor. Amen.

¹ From the Annals of the Order of the Servants of Mary.

Queen of Prophets

MARY FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS

"From the beginning, and before the world was I was created, and unto the world to come I shall not cease to be, and in the holy dwelling-place I have ministered before him."

(ECCLUS. XXIV, 14.)

JUST as the coming of the Messiah was announced in the Old Testament by a long series of figures and prophecies, in like manner also God disposed that the advent of Mary should be foretold by a number of prophetic utterances, and forshadowed by different persons and symbolic figures in the Old Law.

Indeed, when God prepares some great event, He usually paves the way for it centuries in advance by certain revelations and diverse mystic figures, thus to dispose men to receive more abundantly the graces prepared for them.

Together with the Incarnation of the Word, the dignity of Mother of God and co-Redemptress of the human race is the grandest and most glorious fact in the world's history. It was, then, only fitting that the same voices, which had predicted Christ, should announce the com-

ing of the Blessed Mother with equal eloquence, and that the same symbols instituted by God to foreshadow the future Messias, should serve also to prefigure Mary. Thus, the Holy Scriptures are full of allusions referring to the exalted woman who was one day to beget the Word Made Flesh.

Happy they, to whom the Holy Spirit makes plain the sense of Holy Scripture by the gift of understanding, showing them in the principal symbols of the Ancient Law, the image of Mary beside that of the Messias.

* * *

Among the prerogatives which go to form the diadem of the Mother of God, the most eminent are without doubt her Immaculate Conception, her perpetual Virginity and her dignity of co-Redemptress of mankind. Wherefore, we need be under no astonishment, if these prerogatives were made the subject of special prophecies.

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin was predicted immediately after the fall of Adam: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."¹ This noteworthy woman was to be no other than Mary. In virtue of the

¹ GEN. III, 15.

future merits of Jesus Christ, her Son, the Holy Virgin was to be exempt from original sin, thus scoring a complete triumph over the enemy of our salvation.

The prophecy concerning the virginal birth of Christ is found in the words with which God announced to King Achaz, besieged in Jerusalem by the allied kings of Syria and Israel, the accomplishment of that wonderful fact, as a pledge of his near deliverance: "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel."¹ In truth the Incarnation of a Divine Person in a Virgin's womb is the greatest of God's works.

Finally, the sacrifice which Mary was to offer in union with Jesus for the world's salvation was announced by the Prophet Jeremias, when he thus represented this Immaculate Virgin: "Weeping she hath wept in the night and her tears are on her cheeks."² This was in truth a foreboding of what Mary would suffer, when, assisting at the bloody scene of Calvary, she should witness the accomplishment of the mystery of our Redemption.

* * *

Besides the prophecies concerning Mary contained in the Old Testament, there are also to be found therein many types or figures of her and

¹ ISAI. VII, 14.

² LAMENT. I, 2.

her high prerogatives. Among these symbols, we note some drawn from living persons, others from inanimate things, all disclosing, each in its own way, the virtues and privileges of the Immaculate Virgin.

The deeds of Deborah, Jael and Judith foreshadow the future triumphs of the Mother of God over her enemies; Esther proclaims her matchless beauty, Abigail her prudence and the mother of the Machabees her generous ardor in suffering for Christ. Again, the earthly paradise, Noah's ark, Jacob's ladder, the burning bush, the golden candlestick and so forth, are so many symbolic figures of Mary, of her endowments and grandeur.

It is, then, true to say that, after Jesus, nothing is so much the object of the divine complacency as Mary, since God desired that the eyes of mankind should be turned constantly toward her from the very beginning, by foreshadowing her in saintly personages and sacred symbols.

EXAMPLE

ST. PHILIP NERI

Devotion to the glorious Mother of God is not only a source of holiness for those who practice it, but it often becomes for them a fountain of extraordinary favors. God, in fact, not infre-

quently disposes that the faithful servants of this heavenly Queen should be distinguished with one or another of those supernatural prerogatives with which He was pleased to enrich the soul of his Mother. For this reason it may be said that the more a person is animated by true devotion to the Queen of Heaven, the more such a person is made to partake of those extraordinary gifts with which the Holy Ghost beautified the soul of His beloved Spouse in the course of her mortal life.

It is well known how St. Philip Neri loved and venerated the Blessed Virgin and how he desired to see her honored and loved by his penitents. He often invoked her by her most beautiful titles, and he used to call her his love and the heavenly dispenser of the graces of her Lord. In this way he infused into those who approached him an unbounded confidence in Mary's patronage. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Philip received from God, through Mary's hands, some of those particular gifts which God Himself had bestowed upon His Mother.

One of these gifts was the spirit of prophecy and discernment of hearts, so that as the Holy Ghost had replenished the soul of Mary with heavenly wisdom, manifesting to her the hidden things of Heaven, so St. Philip was filled, though to a lesser degree, with this extraordinary favor

of knowing things hidden to the eyes of men.

Many indeed were the things foretold by this Saint not only in ordinary matters but with regard to extraordinary events and out-of-the-way circumstances. With regard to his gift of the discernment of hearts, it must be admitted that St. Philip Neri was perfectly cognizant of the interior state of many who came to him, so much so that any one who had committed some fault and would not repent of it, did not dare to approach him, for they knew that the state of their conscience was known to him.

It was also by the aid of our blessed Lady, that St. Philip obtained the conversion of so many hardened sinners who had resisted the grace of God. By his works in the mystical vineyard of Christ, and by the victories which through his prophetic spirit he gained over sin and the devil, he won the beautiful title of "Apostle of Rome," which was due in great part to his unbounded confidence and devotion to our blessed Lady, who is rightly invoked as the "Queen of Prophets."

PRAYER

O Mary, Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the Incarnate Word and our Mother too, obtain for us firmly to believe in the great mystery of the

Redemption until our last breath, and to merit to partake in the benefits which Jesus Christ, thy Son, has purchased for us by His passion and death. Amen.

Queen of Apostles

GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE IN MARY

"I proposed therefore to take her to me, to live with me; knowing that she will communicate to me of her good things, and will be a comfort in my cares and grief." (WISD. VIII, 9.)

THE gift of knowledge, which grace produces in our souls together with the other gifts of the Holy Ghost, is a supernatural quality, enlightening our intelligence and helping us to discern with ease, in matters of faith, truth from falsehood, what is certain from what is uncertain, what is real from what is only apparent. It is an interior disposition, which makes man as it were spiritual, and enables him to form a right judgment concerning the things of this world. "The spiritual man judges all things."¹

This gift prompts us to desire and seek after truth alone. It helps us to refute, as if by instinct, the sophisms spun by wicked men against the dogmas of our faith, and makes us understand the emptiness of earthly goods when compared with the pure joys of heaven. Happy

¹ 1 COR. II, 15.

they who possess this gift; they know how to despise worldly pleasures and to esteem afflictions and crosses at their true worth.

The gift of knowledge is, furthermore, a bright lamp provided us by Divine Providence, the radiance of which illumines all human sciences, and makes them subject to the science of the saints, which should rule as a Queen over all other sciences.

Give me, O my God, this precious gift which will enable me to hold fast by Thy teachings, and will direct me to distinguish between truth and error, the false maxims of the world and the sound doctrines Thou hast delivered to us through the ministry of Thy Church.

* * *

Not content with granting to Mary a wonderful insight into the truths of revelation, God imparted to her, through the gift of knowledge, a kind of interior instinct which enabled her to pass an unerring verdict upon the things of this world. She easily understood how it is that all human sciences necessarily converge toward God, the primary source of all truth.

It was through the working of this gift of knowledge that the Blessed Virgin, when saluted by St. Elizabeth as Mother of God, uttered those profound words which shall ever be a subject of admiration for the whole world.

By an effect of this same gift, Mary, during the hidden life of Jesus, knew how to profit by the teaching of her Son, discerning at once between truths proclaimed by Him and the false maxims of the world, and valuing at their proper worth the labors He would freely undergo to redeem us from the bondage of sin. By the efficacy of this gift, she held of no account the deceitful goods of this earth, saying with St. Paul: "The things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ."¹

From the first moment of her Immaculate Conception, Mary was endowed with the gift of knowledge, having been enriched, from that first moment, with sanctifying grace. But it was on the day of Pentecost that the fulness thereof came to her, when the Holy Ghost descended visibly upon her and upon the disciples gathered together in the supper-room. She then indeed became Queen of the Apostles, having received the divine gifts in a measure far greater than that granted to all the Apostles together, wherefore she is called by sacred writers, "Mistress of the Apostles."

* * *

Never, perhaps, has the gift of knowledge been so necessary to a Christian as at the present time. The father of lies is making incred-

¹ PHIL. III, 7.

ible efforts to spread misbelief and heresy throughout the world, and one must be blind not to see the headway that evil is making, particularly through the spreading of a corrupt press, the hireling of error and vice.

However, the greatest danger does not come from the avowed enemies of the Church. It comes from those writers who, greedy of worldly renown, in reality are engaged in marring the purity of our faith. Under the pretence of defending the Christian dogmas, these writers are bent upon eliminating from the Gospel whatsoever is not in keeping with their own erroneous view, or with the baneful tendencies of modern times, thus making a league with error.

Oh, how we should be on our guard against these perfidious enemies! Let us entreat the Holy Ghost to be our guide in the midst of so many errors, and Himself to teach us, "to know the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge,"¹ in order that we may always preserve inviolate the precious treasure of faith.

EXAMPLE

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

St. John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, was among the apostles named "the beloved" of

¹ EPH. III, 19.

Jesus, as is signified in those words "The one whom Jesus loved." At the Last Supper he merited to lay his head on the bosom of his Divine Master. This Apostle responded to his Lord's great love by repaying Him with a like heartfelt affection, for which we have abundant proofs in his writings and his life.

This love for Jesus, however, was ever accompanied in St. John by a singular love for Mary, as Jesus Himself bore testimony on the cross. Indeed, while the Redeemer was suffering the agonies of the crucifixion, He pointed out St. John to Our Lady, who was there present on Calvary, saying to her: "Woman, behold thy son"; and to St. John: "Behold thy Mother."

Thus did Our Saviour signify that St. John was to be united to Our Lady as a dear son is united to his mother, even in the same manner as Jesus Himself was united to her. St. John himself tells us how faithfully he corresponded to the mission entrusted to him, for henceforth he received Our Lady into his home. Hence tradition represents him as the faithful guardian of Our Lady while she remained on this earth.

As love is preserved and fostered by mutual friendly intercourse, we may say that St. John was the person who loved Our Lady most after St. Joseph, for no other person, except the chaste Spouse of Mary, dwelt with her so long or with greater intimacy. This familiar living with

Mary merited for St. John that spiritual insight into the things of God, which is apparent from his writings. Indeed, we see that he, more than the other apostles, penetrated into the heavenly mystery of the Incarnation and the hidden things of the adorable Heart of Jesus, whence he is called the Apostle of Charity.

St. John was visited with heavenly visions in the island of Patmos and prophesied the future events of the Church. No less conspicuous was he in the great dignity of the Apostolate, for he founded and governed the Churches of Asia, suffering persecutions and even the torment of martyrdom for the Faith, although he did not actually suffer death at the hands of the persecutors. He was the last of the apostles to pass out of this life and this in his ninetieth year, being adorned with the triple halo of Apostle, Doctor and Virgin.

PRAYER

O Mary, it was the Holy Ghost Himself who taught thee that sage discernment, by which thou didst despise the pleasures of the world and esteem only the things of heaven. Obtain for me, I pray thee, from this Spirit of knowledge and truth, the grace to despise the false maxims of the world, and ever to preserve intact in my soul the sacred deposit of faith. Amen.

Queen of Martyrs

MARY THE COMPANION OF JESUS IN HIS SUFFERINGS

"To what shall I compare thee? To what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? To what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O Virgin daughter of Sion? for great as the sea is thy destruction." (LAMENT. II, 13.)

WHO is this virgin of whom the prophet speaks in such mournful accents? Why is her sorrow so deep, that it can be compared to no other sorrow? Certainly we should hesitate to believe that it is of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus that Jeremias spoke, were it not for the Gospel narrative, which portrays her standing by the cross of her dying Son.¹

Yes, it is indeed Mary, the peerless Virgin of Juda, whose pure soul was never sullied with the slightest stain of sin, upon whose head, however, sufferings without number were heaped. In predestining her to be Mother of the Word, God had also decreed that she should become Queen of Martyrs, for it behoved her to share all the pains which her Divine Son endured

¹ JOHN, XIX, 25.

during the thirty-three years of His mortal life, and to unite her own sufferings with those of the Incarnate Word, for the salvation of the human race.

With Jesus, Mary tasted the sorrows of exile, and with Him she quaffed the last dregs of that bitter cup prepared by the malice of men for the world's Redeemer. The outrages leveled at the God-Man recoiled upon her and she became in truth the most afflicted of mothers. She offered to God on Calvary the Holy Victim, and endured without flinching the bitterness of death. Finally, her last and supreme sorrow was to accompany the adorable body of her Son to the tomb: then her desolation reached its climax: "He hath made me desolate, wasted with sorrow all the day long." ¹

* * *

When we pause to consider the things of this world, we perceive that this earth is a place of toil and trouble, not of joy and rest. The afflicted form the greater part of mankind, and the rare consolations which come to us are not without their dash of bitterness.

For the worldly-minded man, bent only on pleasure and enjoyment, the law of pain appears exceedingly hard: he cannot bow to it, it irritates him, and he is forever in pursuit of

¹ LAMENT. I, 13.

the fleeting image of happiness which evades his grasp.

The man of faith, on the other hand, accustomed to regard all things by the light of God's grace, recognizes an admirable disposition of Providence in the law of suffering. Far from rebelling against this law, he submits to it, adores it and humbles himself beneath the chastening hand. He blesses this fatherly hand no less when it strikes, than when it bestows favors and graces. The man of faith understands that God smites only to heal, that this earth is not our true country, and that suffering is necessary to expiate sin. Now, are we not all sinners? Let us not, then, wonder if we are called to suffer.

O Mary, inseparable companion of Jesus Crucified, teach me the secret of this divine law of pain, that, in thy school, I may learn, by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ and thine own, to submit with a willing heart to the dispositions of Providence in my regard.

* * *

Mary being exempt from all sin, was not naturally subject to the law of pain; like Adam in the garden of Eden, she should never have experienced aught but joy and gladness. And without doubt, so it would have been, had she been an ordinary creature. But in the designs

of God, Mary was predestined to become the masterpiece of grace, and it behoved her to pass through suffering, in order that she might attain to the perfection to which she had been called.

Furthermore, as Mother of the Redeemer, Mary was to coöperate as much as a creature could do so with Jesus Christ, in the work of our redemption, just as Eve in the earthly paradise had had a part in bringing about our ruin; and as the Saviour was to restore us by suffering, so Mary must drink the bitter chalice with Him.

Besides, since Mary was destined to be the Mother of the human race, it was necessary that she should know sorrow, in order that she might compassionate the miseries of her earth-born children.

Mary's soul was therefore overwhelmed and plunged in bitterness surpassed only by that of her Son. "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" ¹

EXAMPLE

VENERABLE ANNA JULIANA GONZAGA

Anna Catharine Gonzaga belonged to the band

¹ LAMENT. I, 12.

of those privileged souls who love to contemplate the mystery of the sorrows of Mary and endeavor to follow her on the royal road of the cross. While yet a child she used to fast every Saturday in her honor and she continued this devout practice to the end of her life. On the death of the Archduke Ferdinand I, her husband, Anna, renouncing earthly grandeurs, refused to marry again.

After having restored the Servite Order in Austria, she chose to hide herself with her eldest daughter and some other noble gentlewomen in a convent of this Order which she herself had erected at Innsbruck. At her reception of the habit she took the name of Sister Anna Juliana, in honor of St. Juliana Falconieri, the glorious Foundress of the Servite Third Order.

So glad was Sister Anna to see herself clothed in the somber habit of the Servants of Mary, that kissing it devoutly she would exclaim: "O Mother most holy, how have I merited so great a favor, as to be clothed in the habit of thy sorrows? How have I been worthy to deserve this great treasure hidden to so many others? What wealth or what rank could equal so excellent a boon? To consecrate myself wholly to thee is not enough, I am not worthy to thank thee sufficiently. Do thou therefore, most Holy Mother, render thanks for me."

When she received the news that Anna, her

second daughter, had been crowned as Empress, taking in her hand the holy habit, she said to the messenger: "May my daughter Anna enjoy her royal crown; for me this habit with which I have been honored by the Queen of Heaven, is a thousand times more dear to my heart."

In order to induce her Sisters to bear ever in their mind the memory of the bitter passion of Jesus and the sorrows of Mary, the Venerable Anna Juliana prescribed among other practices that they should begin and end the Office of Our Lady with the invocation: "May the passion of Our Lord and the compassion of our blessed Lady be ever in our hearts and in our bodies. Amen."

Desiring, moreover, to partake of the sufferings of Mary, she begged to be allowed to share in the sorrows which overwhelmed her maternal heart at the foot of the cross, and her prayer was granted. Thus, having tenderly compassionated the Queen of Martyrs in this life, she was called to the joys of heaven, in the year 1620.¹

PRAYER

O Mary, most sorrowful Virgin, I compassionate thee in thy woe. Thou shouldst never have known suffering, thou the most innocent of creatures, had it not been that, like Jesus,

¹ From the *Annals of the Order of the Servants of Mary*.

thou wouldst bear the punishment of our sins.
Obtain for me of thy Son, I beg thee, the grace
to hate sin with all my heart, as the sole cause
of thy sufferings and of the passion of Jesus
Christ. Amen.

Queen of Confessors

VIRTUE OF FAITH IN MARY

"Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished, that were spoken to thee by the Lord." (LUKE, I, 45.)

FAITH, the root and basis of our justification, is a supernatural gift which God bestows upon the soul, to guide it toward the possession of His love upon earth and of Himself in heaven. By the theological virtue of faith, our intellect believes the truths of revelation, and although it does not comprehend them, it nevertheless assents to them freely, but at the same time most firmly, as though these truths were made evident to it. Faith also keeps us from error, and holds always before our eyes the last end for which we were created, thus guiding our steps in the way of salvation.

Faith is, then, a priceless gift; beyond all comparison more desirable than all the reasonings of philosophy, or the discoveries of men of science.

What disastrous ruin befalls the soul in which this heavenly light is quenched! If a man by

mortal sin loses divine grace, he is not thereby altogether cut off from all means of recovery; his understanding still remains united to God, he still acknowledges God as his last end and the sole good which can fully satisfy the cravings of his soul. But if unhappily he should lose faith, ah! then indeed, he is removed far from God, and the action of Christ's redemption cannot reach him.

Oh, how pitiful is the condition of the unbeliever, who is "without Christ, alien from the conversation of Israel and stranger to the testament, having no hope of the promise, and without God in this world!"¹

* * *

Mary's faith was the most perfect that ever existed: it is consequently worthy to be proposed for our imitation. Jesus Christ by virtue of the hypostatic union, enjoyed continually the beatific vision of the Divine Essence. He could not consequently practice the virtue of faith. Preëminence, therefore, in the exercise of this virtue, belongs to Mary, who for this reason is called Queen of Confessors. That is why those whose lives are spent in disseminating in one way or another the Gospel of Jesus Christ, take Mary for their patroness. Mary, whose faith never waned, obtains for them

¹ EPH. II, 12.

that their preaching may prove fruitful in men's hearts.

However, the faith of no other confessor was ever put to such severe proof as Mary's. On the one hand, the lowly esteem she had of herself might well engender in her, doubts as to the reality of her titles of Mother of God and co-Redemptress of the human race; on the other hand, the self-abasement of Jesus, His labors and opprobrium might have been for her, as they were for so many, an occasion of scandal. Nothing, however, was able to shake her faith in her Son's divine origin and her belief in the office she herself was fulfilling in the work of our redemption. Thus she took her stand by the cross of the dying Jesus, and remained an unshaken witness both to the divinity and to the humanity of Jesus and of the truth of His supernatural mission.

This faith of the Virgin Mother, which shone out with such brightness amid the darkness of an unbelieving world, is indeed worthy of our admiration. Like a brilliant light-house placed upon a firm rock, Mary withstood the fiercest tempests, illuminating the world with the splendor of her faith.

* * *

From early childhood, Mary set herself to the practice of the virtue of faith, thus merit-

ing so deep a penetration into the knowledge and love of God, that she came to possess more grace than can be found in the entire host of assembled Seraphim. Moreover, she had the happiness of seeing accomplished in her the promises made by the Angel, promises which she herself, with prophetic insight, celebrated in her triumph-song, the "Magnificat." This faith was, besides, the principle of her exaltation and the source of that singular power of intercession she was to possess forever in heaven.

Let us appeal to Mary, asking her to intercede for us, that the lamp of our faith may never be put out, but that on the contrary this holy virtue may ever go on growing and increasing in our souls.

EXAMPLE

ST. DOMINIC

St. Dominic was born in the town of Calarhuela, in the diocese of Osma, in Old Castile, of the noble family of Gusman.

From his earliest years Dominic was much given to prayer, and he was especially devout to our blessed Lady, whom he chose for his Mother and Patroness. He successfully completed his studies at the University of Palenza and, on be-

ing raised to the priesthood, devoted himself with great zeal to the salvation of souls.

When his fervor and the purity of his faith became known, he was invited to preach against the Albigenses, a sect of heretics who at that time were infesting the district of Toulouse. He willingly accepted this task, but at first did not see his labors blessed with abundant fruits. He then begged our blessed Lady to inspire him with a more effective way of fulfilling his difficult office. This glorious Virgin appeared to him and told him how easily he could combat the heretics, if he would practice the recital of the Angelical Salutation in the form of the Rosary, according to the method which she herself explained to him. St. Dominic at once began to propagate this great devotion and soon gained a great victory over this heresy.

He was most devout to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. He transcribed the teaching concerning this truth in a book, which was thrice submitted to the trial of fire in the presence of heretics and each time the book remained unharmed in the midst of the flames. He was indefatigable in this crusade and was continually preaching the word of God and bringing sinners to repentance. He obtained most abundant fruits by the propagation of the devotion of the holy Rosary, which was most dear to him.

From Toulouse, the practice of reciting the

holy Rosary spread to other regions, producing everywhere the best results. It was approved and richly indulgenced by several Roman Pontiffs. Dominic, in his ardent zeal for God's glory, founded the Order of Friars Preachers, whose end it was to combat heresy and defend the truths of our holy religion with the help of Our Lady. He died peacefully on the sixth of August, 1221.

PRAYER

O Mary, look down on us, poor sinners, with a gaze of pity, and see with how many dangers our faith is encompassed, on the part of the world and of the devil. O Mother of Mercy, present our humble supplication, reinforced by thine intercession, before the throne of the Most High, as we say with the Apostles: "Lord, we believe: do thou increase our faith."¹ Amen.

¹ LUKE, XVII, 5.

Queen of Virgins

VIRTUE OF TEMPERANCE IN MARY

"Oh, how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory! For the memory thereof is immortal! because it is known both with God and with men."
(WISD. IV, 1.)

THE Church teaches us that the Christian life is a perpetual penance to which we must all submit in expiation of our sins. Our divine Redeemer Himself impressed upon us this great truth when He said: "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish."¹

The object of penance is, in the first place, to lead us to refrain ourselves, in so far as reason and faith demand, from the inordinate desire of sensual pleasure, to which our fallen nature is inclined. So strong is this inclination, that we are ever in danger of falling into the slough of vice. How many Christians, alas, by following their unbridled imagination, lose both soul and body together!

Wherefore, Holy Church imposes upon us the obligation of fasting, putting us in mind of the advantages which accrue from this salutary

¹ LUKE, XIII, 3.

practice. Fasting, in effect, "represses vices, raises our thoughts heavenward, makes easy the practice of virtue, and is a constant source of merit." ¹

Let us set ourselves to appreciate as we should, Christian mortification, which procures for us so many and such great advantages for time and eternity.

* * *

As Mary was not tainted with original sin, she did not experience in herself this disorderly proneness to the pleasures of sense, the baneful consequence of the sin of our first parents. Being full of grace, she maintained always the just balance of the powers of her soul. She performed all her actions with ease and delight, not having to use violence with herself, in order to preserve that even poise of the faculties, which reason and the law of God demand.

Nevertheless, Mary subjected herself willingly to the law of penance and mortification, denying herself those pleasures which others are wont to seek after with an unquenchable craving. Her life was one long series of privations and self-denials. Her fasting and abstinence was continual. She only allowed herself what was necessary to maintain life and no more. She mortified all her senses, so that it were hard to

¹ Preface for Lent.

say in what particular kind of mortification she excelled, in modesty of the eyes, in lowliness of mien, in the sparingness of her words or in the dignity of her gestures.

It was natural, then, that her Heavenly Bridegroom should find in her all His delight. And as the fruit of this temperance, Mary acquired an extraordinary facility in conversing familiarly with her Well-Beloved, a heavenly joy which was depicted on her countenance, a virginal beauty which radiated from her whole presence, a something so indescribably sweet and majestic, that it gave to her an aspect rather divine than human: "How beautiful art thou my love, how beautiful art thou! Thine eyes are as doves' eyes, besides what is hid within!"¹

* * *

The virtue of temperance is necessary to the Christian who would live according to the law of God. When this virtue is wanting, the spirit becomes the slave of the flesh. It can no longer relish things divine; for, says St. Paul, "the sensual man perceiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God."²

In fact, gluttony and gross living naturally tend to the obscuring of the intellect and to the quenching of spiritual light. It is vain, there-

¹ CANT. IV, 1.

² 1 COR. II, 14.

fore, to look for wisdom among those that live in luxury and abundance: "Wisdom is not found in the land of them that live in delight." ¹ Moreover intemperance, by exciting a wild gaiety, often provokes bickerings and dissensions, and it is a known fact that gluttony takes a greater toll of human lives than does disease. But what is still worse, intemperance excites in man all kinds of impure thoughts, which find vent in words, gestures and actions contrary to holy modesty; it hardens the heart and prepares the way to eternal perdition.

EXAMPLE

BLESSED ELIZABETH PICENARDI

This illustrious Servant of Mary was born in Mantua, in the year 1428. In her infancy, she preferred prayer and recollection to childish pastimes, thus foreboding the great sanctity to which she would one day attain. Animated with lively devotion to our blessed Lady, she retired, after her mother's death, to the house of her sister and begged that she might be given the habit of the Third Order of the Servants of Mary. From that time, her whole life was one continual exercise of the most sublime virtues. She meditated continually on the passion of Jesus

¹ JOB, xxviii, 13.

and the sorrows of Mary, and she never let a day pass without purifying her soul in the sacrament of Penance, that she might receive the Holy Eucharist with greater spiritual fruit. She fasted frequently and always wore an iron chain next her skin. Every day she recited the Divine Office with great fervor and devotion, striving to penetrate the mystical and sublime meaning of the liturgical and scriptural prayers.

Her holiness and example attracted many noble ladies to the service of God. Under her wise direction these persons attained a high degree of perfection. Many convents of the Servite or Mantellate Sisters were founded by the help of Blessed Elizabeth.

Mary, whose chosen daughter she was, deigned to visit her many times in her poor cell, joining in familiar conversation with her. So great was her power of intercession, that it sufficed for any one to recommend himself to her prayers, for him to obtain from Mary all the graces he desired. Thus she was known as the "Mediatrice with the Mother of God."

Her humility was so profound, that she thought herself to be the most wretched of creatures, and God in return for this granted her many favors. It is generally thought that Blessed Elizabeth never lost her baptismal innocence. Moreover, she possessed the gift of prophecy to a marked degree, and among other things she fore-

told the day of her death, which occurred in the year 1468, being the forty-first year of her age. She then had the privilege of contemplating the Child Jesus and His-holy Mother, who were present, to assist her in the passage from time to eternity.

The body of the Blessed Elizabeth rests at Mantua, in the Church of St. Bernard. This great Servant of Mary continually obtains from God many graces and favors for all who have recourse to her with confidence. The Sovereign Pontiff Pius VII placed her among the Blessed on the twentieth of November, 1804.

PRAYER

O Mary, most temperate of virgins, thou didst taste, more than any other creature, the pure joys of the spiritual life. Help me, I beg thee, to overcome the seductions of sense, in order that, preserving myself chaste in body and soul, I may enjoy with thee those spiritual delights which are promised to us, through the merits of Christ Jesus, our Saviour. Amen.

Queen of All Saints

THE CORONATION OF MARY IN HEAVEN

"And he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti."

(ESTHER, II, 17.)

THE resurrection and assumption of Mary were immediately followed by her coronation in heaven. Mary's entry into glory was celebrated with tokens of the greatest joy by all the denizens of the Celestial Court. The Incarnate Word arose on His Mother's entrance, and seated her at His right hand. He then placed upon her head a crown fairer and more resplendent than any diadem bespangled with the most precious gems: *Corona aurea super mitram eius*.¹ Then, with one accord, the Angelic choirs made heaven ring with the glad melody: *Regina Cæli, lætare, alleluia!*

On the crown which adorned Mary's brow were graven the titles of her excellence and the most glorious deeds she had achieved in her mortal life.

Ah, indeed, Mary was worthy to be crowned in heaven. Had she not, by the merits of Je-

¹ EOCLES. XLV, 14.

sus Christ, her Son, crushed the proud head of the infernal serpent? Had she not offered herself and her beloved Jesus to death for the redemption of mankind? Was she not that unconquerable Virgin who triumphed over the world and the devil?

Rejoice, my soul, that Mary, thy Mother, has been crowned by the Almighty, Queen of All Saints, and proclaimed by Him Sovereign and Mistress of heaven and earth.

* * *

Amongst the saints reigning in heaven, there are some who, besides the crown of glory which decks their brows, possess also a distinctive mark, in token of some peculiar merit they have acquired in life. This mark is called aureola, and it is of three kinds; that of the Martyrs, of the Doctors and of the Virgins.

The Mother of God did not receive an aureola properly speaking, because her crown of glory is so dazzlingly bright, as to eclipse all distinctive marks of singular excellence. The spotless purity of her soul, the ardent charity which burned in her immaculate heart, her profound knowledge of the divine mysteries, all these things were perfectly expressed by the matchless splendor of her crown of glory, which outshone in its brilliancy the beauty of all the crowns of lesser saints put together.

While the sun robed Mary with its royal mantle, and the moon was set as a footstool under her feet, twelve shining stars encircled her head with radiant splendor, as though to enhance yet more her crown of glory: they were, as it were, the outward expression of the extraordinary virtues and precious gifts which adorned her soul.

Though crowned with such exceeding glory, Mary did not, however, lose anything of that sweet mother-love infused into her heart by God, when, at the foot of the cross, she was appointed our spiritual Mother. On the contrary, her kindness, her mercy, her compassion for us are intensified in proportion to her exaltation. She now uses her high position only to aid us and load us with benefits.

Ah, how happy should we esteem ourselves to have for our Queen such an exalted creature, who is at the same time the most tender of mothers!



It oftentimes happens that the images of Mary, venerated in the most renowned sanctuaries of the world, are crowned with solemn pomp by the prelates of the Church. Such ceremonies are but a faint and far-off shadow of the august pageantry of her coronation in heaven. It would be wrong to see in these acts a vain pretension or

a rash temerity; it is only filial piety which prompts the Church to crown here below the image of her, who became at the foot of the cross our Advocate and Mother.

The Redeemer, in placing on Mary's brow a crown of everlasting glory, desired to bear witness to the fidelity of His Mother. In the same way, the golden crowns with which the sacred ministers adorn the images of the Immaculate Virgin, are meant as tokens of grateful homage on the part of humanity at large to its supreme Benefactress. It is, furthermore, an act of reparation for the ingratitude whereof so many are guilty toward her, and an expression of love in atonement for the many offenses which, alas! sinners commit against our august and merciful Queen. And Mary, as a kind and loving Mother, does not disdain such acts of atonement, but graciously accepts them as tokens of mankind's filial love.

EXAMPLE

THE MIRACULOUS CURE OF TWO DUMB BOYS

A pious custom exists in Catholic countries of placing, on the exterior walls of houses some picture or statue of our blessed Lady, whereby those who pass by may be reminded to render homage to the Queen of Heaven. How pleasing

such acts of reverence are to the Mother of God, may be seen from the miracles which took place in the town of Reggio, in Emilia, on the evening of the twenty-ninth of April, 1596.

The Religious of the Order of the Servants of Mary had painted on the outward side of their garden wall a picture of Our Lady, and the citizens never failed to salute it when passing. The devotion of the people toward this picture increased as time went on, and little children used to come with their parents every evening to sing the praises of Mary before it.

It happened, one day, while several people were gathered together, that among these pious visitors was found a boy of fifteen named Mark, of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, who was both deaf and dumb. While he was kneeling with hands joined in prayer, expressing in this way his tender affection toward Our Lady, he suddenly felt his tongue growing in his mouth, and transported by joy he exclaimed: "Jesus Mary!" Mary had answered the prayer of the poor boy. He was perfectly cured.

The fame of this miracle spread far and wide, and soon reached the ears of the Bishop of Modena, Monsignor Claudius Rangoni, who ordered a process of this event to be canonically instituted.

Meanwhile another young boy, who also was dumb, had recourse to the same image of Our

Lady, and suddenly recovered the use of his tongue. The Sovereign Pontiff, Clement VIII, hearing of these marvelous occurrences, declared the picture to be miraculous and ordered that it should be venerated as such by all the faithful.

But miracle succeeded miracle and on the sixth of June of the following year, 1597, in the presence of Alphonsus II duke of Ferrara, Modena e Reggio and of his consort Margaret Gonzaga, the first stone of a magnificent church was solemnly blessed. This church is now known as the "Shrine of Our Lady of Ghiara."¹

PRAYER

We rejoice with thee, O Virgin Immaculate, at the glory which thy Son, true God and true Man, heaped upon thee on the day of thy coronation. Grant, we beseech thee, that we too, after this short life, may be admitted to contemplate thine incomparable glory in heaven. Amen.

¹ From Annals of the Order of the Servants of Mary.

Queen Conceived without Original Sin

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

"Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people."

(JUDITH, XV, 10.)

AFTER the hypostatic union, that is to say, the personal union of the Word with our nature, there is nothing in the world which so gives glory to God as the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

It was for the outward manifestation of His greatness and glory that God, in the beginning, drew from nothingness creatures endowed with intelligence. But sinful man, by revolting against his Creator, defaced the image of the Divinity impressed on his soul: he became God's enemy, so far as to appear an object of aversion in the sight of the Creator. But shall no one be found to escape the universal ruin, and in whom the original plan of the Creator will remain unimpaired? Are all reasonable creatures to be infected by the envenomed bite of the infernal serpent?

No, God's work cannot be entirely destroyed.

Mary in virtue of the foreseen merits of her Son, the future Redeemer, shall be conceived without stain, all fair and wholly pure, the equal of Adam and Eve in their first formation. She shall even receive at the moment of her conception more abundant grace than that granted to our first parents: "Thou art all fair, O Mary, and the original stain is not in Thee." ¹

How can we voice Mary's beauty, at the moment her God-created soul was infused into her virginal body? A sight indeed worthy of the angels' admiration! O Virgin Immaculate, object of delight to the Holy Trinity, thou art of a truth "the glory of Jerusalem."

* * *

Not only was the Immaculate Conception of Mary calculated to procure fresh honor to God by giving to the world the spectacle of an unblemished sanctity, but furthermore, this mystery was destined to be, for the human race, a source of endless joy: "Thou art the joy of Israel."

In fact, Mary Immaculate is of a truth that peerless woman, whom the Seer of Patmos beheld "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." ² Her beauty and purity are for fallen humanity a source of glory and consolation. If the human

¹ Antiphon at Lauds in the Office of the Immaculate Conception.

² APOC. XII, 1.

race was defiled by the sin of the first man in its origin, it may now boast of having produced this spotless flower, which confers upon the stem, whence it has sprung, greater honor than original transgression has caused it damage and shame.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary, like a radiant dawn, heralded the coming of the Sun of Justice, which would dissipate the darkness of error and bring to the world the light of grace, of truth and of glory. The Immaculate Conception was, then, the prelude of that new joy, which the Gospel of Jesus Christ would restore upon the earth. Wherefore the Church sings: "Thy Conception, O Virgin Mother of God, has been a presage of joy for the whole universe."¹

* * *

Mary's Immaculate Conception is not only a cause of spiritual joy for the human race, it is also for the faithful, that is to say, for the people of Jesus Christ, predestined to the reward of everlasting life, a potent help in their earthly conflicts and an assured pledge of victory: "Thou art the honor of our people."

By hurling our first parents into the pitfall of sin and misery, the devil thought to have triumphed over their posterity: but he was completely routed by Mary, in whom he found nothing of his, as she was conceived without taint of

¹ Antiphon of the Magnificat in the Second Vespers of the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

sin: and thus the Immaculate Conception brought to nought the projects of the great deceiver.

Moreover, since Mary's exemption from the original stain was ordained by God in view of her divine maternity, which is the beginning of our redemption, the privilege of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin proved to be the sovereign means which reduced to nought the snare laid by the demon against our eternal salvation. "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed, she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel." ¹

EXAMPLE

THE DEVOTION OF EMPEROR FERDINAND III

In the year 1629, the Emperor of Austria, Ferdinand III, finding his kingdom menaced by the Swedes, who were elated at their recent victories and conquests, had recourse to the protection of Our Lady. He caused a magnificent column to be erected in the great square of Vienna and this was adorned with many emblems, which all referred to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. At the four corners of the pedestal were placed angels in armor,

¹ GEN. III, 15.

each treading the dragon under foot, symbolizing the victory of our blessed Lady over original sin, and on the top of the column stood the statue of the Mother of God treading on the head of the wicked serpent. At the base of the column was engraved the inscription: "To the most good and most high God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, from whom kings hold their thrones: To the Virgin Mother of God, conceived without stain of original sin, by whom princes command, who has this day been chosen by particular devotion as Patroness of Austria, the Emperor Ferdinand III entrusts and consecrates all his possessions, his person, his children, his people, his armies, his domains; and in perpetual memory of this his devotion he has erected this statue."

There was never witnessed a more solemn feast than the celebration of inaugurating this splendid monument; it was indeed a triumph of the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

The pious Emperor, accompanied by his son Ferdinand IV, King of Bohemia and Hungary, by his daughter Marianna of Austria, Queen of Spain, by many ambassadors and all his nobles, by all the religious communities and secular clergy, and followed by an immense crowd, went in procession and closed the ceremony by pronouncing his vow aloud, thus edifying the court and the people by his tender piety.

This pious and splendid act of devotion in

honor of the Immaculate Conception of Mary was so pleasing to her, that effects of her maternal protection were seen without delay. Indeed, when a few days afterwards the Emperor went to Eger, a city close to the enemy's camp, he was able to stop the rapid advance of the Swedes at one blow and obliged them to retire, forcing them to agree to a treaty of peace that was a glorious and lasting one for all his Empire.

PRAYER

O Virgin most holy, conceived without shadow of sin, thou didst remain, during thy whole life, purer and more brilliant than the light of day. We beseech thee to drive far from us the hellish serpent, who seeks to drag us into the abyss of sin: help us to win a complete victory over the enemies of our salvation, that we may be able to praise thee eternally in heaven. Amen.

Queen of the Most Holy Rosary

SPIRIT OF PRAYER IN MARY

"I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired, and his fruit was sweet to my palate: he brought me into the cellar of wine." (CANT. II, 3, 4.)

THERE is not for us, in this life, an action nobler or holier than prayer. By prayer we lift up our soul toward God and enter into communication with Him, with the object of paying our homage to His Divine Majesty, of rendering to Him the worship which is His due, thanking Him for His countless benefits, imploring pardon for our sins, and in fine asking of Him those spiritual and temporal favors of which we stand in need.

In truth, one can imagine nothing more excellent than prayer. It was taught us by our divine Saviour Himself: for we read of Him that He was wont to retire alone to the mountain to pray, and that He had spent whole nights in prayer.¹ Most of all was this so, when the time of His bitter passion was approaching, when, as we read in St. Luke's Gospel, "He prayed the longer."²

¹ LUKK, VI, 12.

² *Ibid.* XXII, 48.

Not content with setting us the example of prayer, Our Lord deigned also to teach us its excellence, delivering to us a formula which contains in brief all that we need ask for our spiritual and temporal welfare. This is the Lord's Prayer, indeed the best of all prayers.

O my soul, thank thy Creator for having given thee, in prayer, so efficacious a means of obtaining all thou requirest, and ask of Him the grace never to neglect so holy and helpful a practice.

* * *

After Jesus Christ, no saint taught us by his example the excellence of prayer as well as the Virgin Mary, for we may truly say that her life was an uninterrupted prayer. Where can we find words to express the fervent aspirations of her heart, when, as yet a little child, she sighed for the coming of the Messias, saying with David: "Arise, O my glory, arise, psaltery and harp!"¹ One may even say that Mary, by the ardor of her desires, hastened the coming of the Redeemer.

But it was especially when the Word was made flesh in her womb, that the life of the Mother of God became one constant and ardent prayer, which continued, almost unbroken, until her soul, in an ecstasy of love, burst the bonds

¹ Ps. LXI, 9.

of the flesh, and left her sacred body, to go and join her Well-Beloved in the transport of the beatific vision.

And now that Mary is united to God in glory, she does not forego her intercession for her faithful servants, who are fighting here below in the midst of all manner of dangers: together with her Son, who is "always living to make intercession for us,"¹ the Holy Virgin offers to the Eternal Father her prayers and supplications. Is it then to be wondered at, if Mary sometimes deigns to appear to her faithful servants in the attitude of prayer, thus manifesting her wish that the faithful should, as often as possible, follow her example in the use of this powerful means of sanctification?

Of all forms of prayer, the recitation of the Rosary is the easiest and, at the same time, the most efficacious. It is the cry of the child which will not leave off calling on its mother until it has obtained what it wants; it is the humble voice of the poor man, who will not leave the gate of the wealthy, until he has received a liberal alms.

* * *

To pray is good; but we must pray aright, if we would obtain the fruit of our prayers.

¹ HEB. VII, 25.

Our wants are indeed numberless, and consequently numberless are also the favors we may ask of God. Nevertheless, we should ask above all else for spiritual gifts; as regards temporal things we may likewise pray to Our Lord for them, but only in so far as they help us to the possession of divine grace.

We may also pray for our neighbor; though with this difference, that when we pray for ourselves we are sure to be heard, while we have not the same certainty as regards our prayers for others.

Finally, our prayer, to obtain its effect, must be accompanied by faith, humility, confidence and perseverance. "We ought always to pray and not to faint," ¹ says Our Lord.

EXAMPLE

THE CONVERSION OF A DYING SINNER

It is recorded in the life of St. Vincent Ferrer that a man, who had led a disorderly life, found himself at the point of death, and was given up by the doctors. He listened with horror to this awful sentence, and the thought of eternity presenting itself forcibly to his mind, he was overcome with remorse for his past faults. Yet, not

¹ LUKE, XVIII, 1.

trusting himself to the mercy of God, he gave way to despair, thinking that he was unworthy of forgiveness.

When St. Vincent Ferrer heard of this, he went to the bed of the dying man and tried to move him to repentance by encouraging him to hope in the divine mercy. He reminded him that Jesus Christ died for each one of us and that He, as a merciful father, receives the prodigal son into His arms; that He pardoned Zachæus, Mary Magdalen and the Good Thief on His cross, and that even if his sins were as numerous as the grains of sand on the sea-shore, the mercy of God would never be overcome, because it is infinite and eternal.

Such words, which would have sufficed to soften the hardest of hearts, only moved this wretched sinner to further blasphemies. He gnashed his teeth, protesting that he would not seek pardon of Jesus Christ, but would die in his sins in order to displease and offend Him the more. At these words St. Vincent did not lose courage, but enlightened by an inspiration from Heaven he answered: "You must be converted, in order that the infinite mercy of God may shine forth the more in you."

Turning then to the bystanders, he commenced to recite the holy Rosary. And oh, marvelous to say! Mary who, in the words of St. Bernard, is the hope of those who despair, heard the prayer

addressed to her on behalf of this unhappy man. The recital of the Rosary had hardly been completed, when that obdurate sinner was changed into another man. In the twinkling of an eye he had become as meek as a lamb, and inviting the Saint to draw near to him, he uttered the sweet Name of Mary. Then, shedding floods of tears, he confessed his sins like the Good Thief on the cross. He received the sacraments and died with every sign of an edifying conversion.

PRAYER

O Mary, most excellent Mistress of the spiritual life, may I learn of thee the right way to pray! Deign O Mother, to intercede for me with thy Divine Son, that I may always grow in faith, humility, confidence and perseverance, that I may reap in joy the fruit of my prayers. Amen.

Queen of Peace

OUR LADY THE MEDIATRIX OF PEACE

"Look upon the rainbow, and bless him that made it: it is very beautiful in its brightness. It encompasseth the heaven about with the circle of its glory: the hands of the Most High have displayed it."

(ECCLUS. XLIII, 12.)

AFTER God had cleansed the world of the iniquity in which it had been steeped, by sending the universal deluge which destroyed the whole human race with the exception of Noe and his family, He promised that patriarch that a similar scourge should never more come upon the earth. In order to seal this promise by a visible sign, He ordained that the rainbow should be for men a reminder of the compact which He had made with them.

It might have been expected that the human race, which soon multiplied, should have lived for a long time in justice and holiness. But men soon began to commit idolatry again, and would have been abandoned by God had He not, in His great mercy, taken pity on them. God, then, determined to save mankind, and to this end made a more solemn compact, in which He de-

creed that the adorable Heart of His own Son Made Man should become our peace and reconciliation: *Cor Jesu, pax et reconciliatio nostra.*

But in order that man might ever have before His eyes the sign of this compact of reconciliation and peace, God displayed in the firmament of His church a second rainbow of incomparable loveliness, that is, the Mother of God, Mary most Holy, who is ever for us a sign that God does not wish to abandon us to sin and death.

* * *

There are three obstacles to our perfect reconciliation with God. The first is the slavery of the devil, which is a deadly outcome of original sin, by which the first man yielded to the suggestions of the common foe. The second obstacle is actual sin, which makes us abominable in God's sight. The third is this, that sin closes against us the doors of the heavenly kingdom.

Now, Mary is indeed the unconquered woman who has removed these impediments to our perfect reconciliation and peace with God. For, in the first place, she was conceived without sin, and thus did not fall under the power of the evil one, and so inaugurated that era of liberty which was to be the fruit of the birth of her Son. Next she brought forth her Son Jesus, the Saviour of the world, who by His passion and death, conquered the devil, and opened for us the gates

of paradise. Therefore she is truly that happy sign which shines forth in the heavens, joyfully proclaiming that mankind has regained the friendship of God, for "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son";¹ and we have "confidence of entering into the Holy of Holies by the blood of Christ."²

* * *

The presence of Our Lady in the world is, for us, not only an earnest of our reconciliation and peace with God, but also a sign of peace with our neighbor, and with ourselves.

Peace with our neighbor consists in that unity of thought and affection which dissolves all discord, jealousy and anger, and banishes all strife and dispute. Now this harmony is but the effect of that great charity which Our Lady brought into the world through her Son, and which she herself taught us by her example. Peace with ourselves is to be found in a perfect agreement among the many faculties of our soul, and in the submission of the passions to reason and grace. Thus, again, Mary is not only our model, but also our powerful helper, who obtains for us, from her Son, the graces that we need, to conquer inordinate desires and have them subjected to the law of God.

¹ ROM. v. 10.

² HEBR. x. 19.

EXAMPLE

ST. NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINO

Nicholas was born in the territory of Sant' Angelo in Colle, in the Province of Ancona, in the year 1245. From his earliest years he showed a great love of God and soon entered the Augustinian Order, where he became a model of religious virtues. He especially shone through his piety, mortification and unfeigned charity.

The great devotion which he nourished toward our Blessed Lady cannot easily be described; a devotion which he had imbibed with his mother's milk, and which increased as he grew older. In honor of Mary he fasted every Saturday, and often during the day he saluted her in the words of the Angel. He failed not to meditate on her bitter sorrows, accompanying her in thought through all the different stages of the passion of Jesus, and mourning with her at the loss of her beloved Son.

While he was at Fermo, Our Lady deigned to make known to him the translation of her Holy House into the territory of Recanati. Thus it was, that he was frequently to be seen standing by a large window which looked out on the Adriatic. His Superior wondering at this, asked him if he was praying to the fishes. "No, Father,

answered Nicholas, "I am expecting a great treasure to pass," and after a short time he saw the Holy House passing by and thus he was able to add his own testimony to support this truth.

Once, when he was oppressed with fever, Our Lady appeared to him and told him to ask for some bread and to mix it with water, and he would recover his health as soon as he tasted it. And so it happened. But Nicholas, moved with compassion for the sick, implored his heavenly Benefactress that she would obtain from her Son the grace for him to bless other loaves in this way, wherewith he might cure these poor sufferers. Our Lady heard his prayers and from this has originated the bread called after his name, that is, the bread of St. Nicholas.

When he was at the point of death he was consoled by the presence of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin and of his glorious Patriarch St. Augustine. Mary then revealed to him that on the third day after her Nativity he would pass to the kingdom of heaven. One cannot describe the joy of his heart at these heavenly tidings. But as the Saint knew well that the devil would redouble his assaults at the last moments of his life, he prayed that this wicked monster might not attack or disturb him at the hour of death. Our Lady granted his request. He died peacefully on the tenth of September, 1305.

PRAYER

O Mary, most justly proclaimed Queen of Peace, for having given us Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and having inaugurated in thyself that blessed reign of divine peace with God, with thy neighbor and with thyself, obtain for us, we beseech thee, from thy Divine Son, so to correspond to His grace, as to enjoy the full blessing of that threefold peace which He Himself brought to the world, and "which surpasseth all understanding." ¹

¹ PHIL. IV, 7.

Queen of Thy Servants

ROYAL DIGNITY OF THOSE WHO SERVE MARY

"O lord, for I am thy servant; I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid." (Ps. CXV, 5.)

TO REIGN, such is the ambition of great souls, the stimulus of bold enterprises. But there are two ways of reigning. The first is that of tyrants, who govern with the sword and prevail by violence and wrong. Such a reign is of short duration and the memory of the tyrant is speedily buried in oblivion: "There memory hath perished with a noise."¹ Others, on the contrary, choose charity for their scepter and humility for their throne. Such a scepter cannot be shattered, and a throne thus founded is never cast down; these are the throne and scepter of Jesus Christ, King of kings, Lord of lords, and Prince over the princes of the earth: "Christ reigns, Christ conquers, Christ commands." The kingdom of Jesus Christ, founded under the shadow of the cross, strengthened by fierce persecutions, is forever extending: it knows neither ruin nor decay: "Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages."²

¹ Ps. IX, 7.

² Ps. CXIV, 18.

Now, what is the basis of a kingdom so permanent, of a throne so unshaken? Strange to say, it is none other than the condition of a servant, freely chosen by Jesus Christ: "He took the form of a servant."¹ Indeed, all that may be procured by ambition and pride is frail and perishable: on the other hand, self-abasement leads to an eternal kingdom, for it is written that "humility goeth before glory."²

* * *

Mary reigns with her Son Jesus Christ, and her kingdom, like unto His, is a kingdom of imperishable glory, because hers is a throne of clemency, mercy and pardon: "Hail, holy Queen Mother of Mercy." And what is the secret of this glorious royalty? None other, but the humble condition of servant of the Lord: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word."³

No sooner had the Blessed Virgin uttered these words, than she commenced her reign, for in that moment she became the Mother of our King: "And the Word was made flesh." Mary's sway over the world never diminishes: it ever goes on extending, until it embraces the entire universe.

Happy the servants of the Mother of God!

¹ PHIL. II, 7.

² PROV. XV, 33.

³ LUKE, I, 38.

Under the protection of a Queen so kind and powerful, they are not lacking in the necessities of life; and as for the goods of the soul, they have them over and above, for "all her domestics are clothed with double garments."¹

* * *

A Christian who is covetous of true and lasting regal splendor, should imitate Mary and faithfully serve the Lord, for He will exalt him to the incomparable dignity of priest and king, according to the words of St. Peter: "You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people: that you may declare His virtues, who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."² But, in order worthily to serve the Lord, we must also learn how to serve Mary: in serving so great a Queen we shall naturally be led to serve God, wherein our greatest dignity consists. To serve Mary is therefore to reign: *Servire Mariæ regnare est.*

The reign of one who serves Mary is no tyranny, no reign of oppression and cruelty: it is rather a reign of charity and mercy, directed to alleviating the woes of those who are in affliction. It is a reign of peace, which repays injury by benefit: a reign of humility, which subjects the passions to the yoke of Christ: a splendid and glorious reign, worthy of the ambition of magnan-

¹ PROV. XXXI, 21.

² 1 PETER, II, 9.

imous minds, the foreshadowing of that eternal kingdom of bliss which is held out to us in heaven.

Oh, if only men knew what a happiness it is to serve Mary, they would contentedly lay aside their wish of ambition and earthly grandeur, and would consecrate themselves, with all the ardor of their souls, to the service of so glorious a Queen.

EXAMPLE

THE APPARITION OF OUR LADY AT LOURDES

As our blessed Lady coöperated with Jesus in our redemption by the martyrdom of her heart, so she does not cease to interpose her powerful intercession before the throne of God, to obtain the salvation of her devoted servants. Among all the shrines of the world from which she bestows her graces, there is none that surpasses Lourdes in splendor and celebrity. It is there especially that Mary shows herself to be truly our heavenly Mediatrix.

On the eleventh of February, 1858, toward noon, a poor but pious girl, of the name of Bernadette Soubirous, went to gather faggots on the banks of the river Gave. She was coming to the foot of the mountain, when suddenly she beheld standing before her a Lady of incomparable beauty. The Lady's hands were devoutly joined

and through them were passing the beads of a Rosary, as if she were reciting it. This was the first of those apparitions which continued until Easter Monday, the fifth of April, in presence of a large concourse of people.

Bernardette, on these occasions, would begin by reciting the Rosary and our blessed Lady, as if attracted by this prayer, did not tarry in showing herself to her chosen servant.

Thus the Queen of Heaven deigned to make known to the world the treasures of her maternal goodness by means of this pious maid. She had chosen Bernadette as the instrument of wonderful happenings and as her messenger to the Christian people. On Wednesday, the twenty-fourth of February of that same year, more than twenty thousand people were assembled on the banks of the river Gave, to witness, not the apparition of Our Lady, for to Bernadette alone was the vision granted, but the spectacle of the transfiguration of the face of this simple and pious maid during her ecstasy. Indeed, the multitude could see the reflection of Our Lady in the resplendent face of Bernadette in the same way as we see the reflection of the sun on the mountain top, when the sun itself is hidden behind the rocky heights.

On one occasion Bernadette was commanded by Our Lady to turn up the dry soil with her hands, and at once there gushed forth a small

spring which later grew into a limpid stream, and which, from that time, has ever continued to flow abundantly. The water from this spring, carried into different parts of the world, has wrought many marvelous cures.

We see from this how Mary, the Mother of Mercy, has designed, especially in these later times, to come to the aid of her servants. Happy are they who place their whole trust in her, for they will not be deceived.

PRAYER

O Mary, potent Queen of the universe, I consecrate myself this day wholly to thy service. Deign to admit me, though a sinner, among thy servants, and obtain for me of Jesus Christ, thy Son, the grace to serve thee faithfully in this life, and to merit to reign with thee everlastingly in Heaven. Amen.

THE END

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OF
The Blessed Virgin Mary

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Laus Deo et Deiparae





